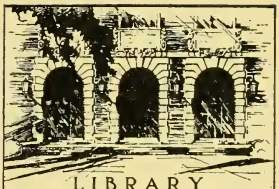

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THE

CHAPLAIN OF THE FLEET

A Novel

BY

WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE

AUTHORS OF

'THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY,' 'THE MONKS OF THELEMA,' 'READY-MONEY MORTIBOY,' 'BY CELIA'S ARBOUR,' 'THIS SON OF VULCAN,' 'MY LITTLE GIRL,' 'THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT,' 'WITH HARP AND CROWN,' 'WHEN THE SHIP COMES HOME,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

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THE

CHAPLAIN OF THE FLEET.

PART II.

THE QUEEN OF THE WELLS.

CHAPTER I.

HOW WE RETURNED TO THE POLITE WORLD.

We love those places most where we lived when we were young, and where we were wooed and won, and where we had those sweet dreams, which can only come to the very young, of a happy future, impossible in this transitory and fleeting life. Dear to me and romantic are the scenes which to many are associated with disease and infirmity, or at best with the mad riot of the race, the assembly, and the ball.

Truly there is no time, for a woman, like the time when she is young and beautiful, and is courted by a troop of lovers. She feels her power, though she does not understand it; she remembers it long after the power has gone, with the witchery of bright eyes, soft cheeks, and blooming youth. I think there can never be any faith or hope in the future so strong as to resist the sigh over the past, the feeling that it is better to be young than to be old: to blossom than to wither.

When we went to Epsom Wells we had managed between us, by silence as to the past and a tacit understanding, to forget the Rules altogether. Forgetting, indeed, is easy. Surely the butterfly forgets the days when it was a mere crawling grub; Cophetua's queen no doubt soon learned to believe that she had royal blood, or blue blood at least, in her peasant veins (for my own part, I think the king should have mated with one nearer his own rank). There is little difficulty in putting out of sight what we wish forgotten. There was a man, for instance, about the Fleet market, running

odd jobs, who actually had forgotten that he was once hanged. The people used to go there on purpose to see the wretch, who was, I remember, bow-legged and long-armed, with broad shoulders; his face was marked with small-pox; he squinted; he had a great scar upon his cheek; the bridge of his nose was broken; he had no forehead visible; his ears projected on either side, and were long, like the ears of a mule; his eye-teeth were like tusks; and as for his expression, it was that which John Bunyan may have had in his mind when he wrote about the mob in Vanity Fair, or the ill-favoured ones who got over the wall and accosted Christiana—an expression which one may briefly describe as indicating a mind not set upon spiritual things. Now this man had actually once been hanged, but being taken away after the hanging to Barber Surgeons' Hall, near St. Giles's Church, Cripplegate, was then restored to life by one who thought to dissect him. That was why everybody looked after him, and would have asked him questions if they had dared accost such a ruffian. For it seemed to the unthinking as if he, alone

among living men, had, like Dante and Virgil, gone into the regions of the dead, conversed with the spirits of the unjust (being himself a monstrous criminal), and, after witnessing their tortures, had returned to the living. To those who bribed him with rum and then put questions, he replied that as for the hanging, it might be as the gentleman said, but he had forgotten it. As for what he saw between his hanging and his restoration to life, he had forgotten that too. Now if a man can forget having been hung, it stands to reason that he can forget anything.

At all events, without the insensibility of this wretch, we speedily agreed to forget the Fleet Rules, and in all our conversations to make as if we had never been there at all, and knew of the place, if at all, then only by hearsay and common bruit and rumour. As for the Chaplain of the Fleet, the great promoter of those marriages which made the place infamous and the chief performer of them notorious, we agreed that we were only to think of him as our benefactor.

Not that we put these resolutions into

words, but we arrived at them in the manner common among women, with whom a smile or a glance is as intelligible as many words (with a bottle of wine) among men.

It was due to this desire to forget the past that we never even read through the 'Farewell to the Fleet,' presented to us by Mr. Solomon Stallabras on the morning of our departure. The first four lines, which was as far as I got, ran as follows:

> 'With easy air of conscious worth expressed,
> Fair Pimpernel her sorrows oft addressed;
> The listening echoes poured her sighs abroad,
> Which, all unheard by men, were heard by God.'

He handed the verses to us with a low bow as we stepped into the coach, leaving him behind still—poor wretch!—'enjoying' the Liberties.

We first repaired, with the view of spending a period of retirement, to a convenient lodging in Red Lion Street, where Mistress Esther set herself seriously to resume the dress, manner, language, and feelings of a gentlewoman.

'We have been,' she said, 'like the sun in eclipse. It is true that one does not cease

to enjoy, under all circumstances, the pride of gentle birth, which has been my chief consolation during all our troubles. But if one cannot illustrate to the eyes of the world the dignified deportment and genteel appearance due to that position, the possession of the privilege is a mere private grace, like the gift of good temper, patience, or hope.'

At first and for some weeks we held daily conversations and consultations on the subject of dress. We were, as may be guessed, somewhat like Pocahontas, of Virginia, when she left the savages and came into the polite world—because we had to begin from the very first, having hardly anything in which a lady could go abroad, and very little in which she could sit at home. Truly delightful was it to receive every day the packages of brocades, lace, satins, silks, sarsnets, besides chintzes, muslins, woollen things, and fine linen wherewith to deck ourselves, and to talk with the dressmaker over the latest fashion, the most proper style for madam, a lady no longer young, and for me, who, as a girl, should be dressed modestly and yet fashionably.

'We must go fine, child,' said Mrs. Esther. 'I, for my part, because a fine appearance is due to my position: you, because you are young and beautiful. The gallants, to do them justice, are never slow in running after a pretty face; but they are only fixed by a pretty face in a pretty setting.'

Alas! to think that my face, pretty or not, already belonged, willy-nilly, to a man who had never run after it.

Mrs. Esther found that not only the fashions of dress, but those of furniture, of language, of manners, and of thought, were changed since her long imprisonment began. We therefore made it our endeavour by reading papers, by watching people, and by going to such places as the Mall, the Park, and even the fashionable churches, to catch, as far as possible, the mode. Mistress Esther never quite succeeded, retaining to the last a touch of antiquated manners, an old-fashioned bearing and trick of speech, which greatly became her, though she knew it not. Meanwhile we held long and serious talk about the rust of thirty years, and the best way to wear it off.

In one of the sermons of the Reverend Melchior Smallbrook, a divine now forgotten, but formerly much read, the learned clergyman states that the sunshine of prosperity is only dangerous to that soul in which tares are as ready to spring as wheat: adducing as a remarkable example and proof of this opinion, the modern prelates of the Church of England, whose lives (he said) are always models to less fortunate Christians, although their fortunes are so great. Now in Mistress Esther's soul were no tares at all, so that the sunshine of prosperity caused no decrease or diminution of her virtues. She only changed for the better, and especially in point of cheerfulness and confidence. For instance, whereas we were formerly wont, being poorly clad, to creep humbly to church, sit in the seats reserved for the poor (which have no backs to them, because the bishops consider the backs of the poor to be specially strengthened by Providence, which hath laid such heavy burdens upon them), and afterwards spend the day sadly over Hervey's 'Meditations among the Tombs,' we now went in hoops, laces, mantles, or cardinals,

with faces patched, to the new church in Queen Square, where we had front seats in the gallery, and after church we dined off roast meat, with pudding, and after dinner read such discourses as presented, instead of penitential meditations, a thankful, nay, a cheerful view of life. I am sure, for my own part, I found the change greatly for the better.

But we made no new friends, because Mrs. Esther wished to remain in strict retirement until she had recovered what she called the Pimpernel Manner.

'It is a Manner, my dear, as you will perceive when I recover it, at once dignified and modest. My father and my grandfather, both Lord Mayors, possessed it to an eminent degree, and were justly celebrated for it. My poor sister would never have acquired it, being by nature too sprightly. I was gradually learning it when our misfortunes came. Naturally afterwards it would have been absurd to cultivate its further development. The Pimpernel Manner would have been thrown away in——such a place as that to which we retired.'

I am so stupid that I never clearly under-

stood the Pimpernel Manner, even when Mrs. Esther afterwards assured me that she had now fully recovered it.

Meantime, my education was resumed in the lighter departments. No girl who had once tackled book-keeping, by single and double entry, could want any more solid instruction. My guardian played the harpsichord for me, while my dancing-master gave me lessons in the minuet; or she personated a duchess, a countess, or even the most exalted lady in the land, while the master, a pink of courtesy, who had once danced on the boards of Drury Lane, presented me dressed in hoops and a train. I was so diligent in dancing that I was soon ready, he assured me, to make a figure at any assembly, whether at Bath, Epsom, Tunbridge Wells, Vauxhall, or Ranelagh. But for the present these gaieties had to be postponed, partly because the Pimpernel Manner was slow in developing, and without it my guardian would not stir abroad, partly because we had no gentleman to go with us. Sir Miles Lackington would, I am sure, have gone with us, had we asked him to take us.

But he was not to be depended upon if a bottle of wine came in the way. Solomon Stallabras would have gone, but the poor poet had no clothes fit for a polite assembly. Moreover, there was an objection, Mrs. Esther said, to both those gentlemen, that the fact of their being in the enjoyment of the Liberties of the Fleet might have been thrown in our teeth at a polite assembly.

It seemed to me, then, being ignorant of the extreme wickedness of men, a grievous thing that gentlewomen cannot go whithersoever they please without the protection of a man. What sort of an age, I asked, is this, which pretends to have cast aside Gothic barbarism, yet cannot suffer its ladies to go unprotected for fear of insult or damage to their reputation? Scourers and Mohocks, I said, no longer infest the streets, which are for the most part secure even from footpads and purse-cutters. I was as yet, however, unacquainted with that class of man which loves to follow a woman, to stare at her, and to make her tremble with fear, being no better, but rather worse, than so many highwaymen, common bullies, and professed rogues.

Sir Miles Lackington did not desert us. Neither my cruelty, he said, nor his own unworthiness could persuade him to do that; he must needs follow and worship at the shrine of his unattainable sun and shining star—with such nonsense as men will still be talking even when they know that the woman is not for them.

On the occasion of the first visit I privately informed him that we wished to have no mention made of the place where we were once residing. He very kindly agreed to silence on this point, and we sustained between us a conversation after the manner of polite circles. Sir Miles would ask us, with a pinch of snuff, if we liked our present lodging—which was, as I have said, in Red Lion Street, not far from the fields and the Foundling Hospital—better than those to be obtained in Hill Street and Bruton Street, or some other place frequented by the best families. Madame, with a fashionable bow, would reply that we were favourably placed as regards air, that of Bloomsbury being good for persons like herself, of delicate chests; and that concerning educational con-

veniences for miss, she found the quarter superior to that mentioned by Sir Miles. Then the honest baronet would relate, without yawning or showing any signs of fatigue, such stories of fashionable life as he had learned from those who had lately come to the Fleet, or remembered from his short career among the world of fashion. We agreed, always without unnecessary waste of words, to consider him as a gentleman about town, familiar with the Great.

The doctor came but rarely. He brought wise counsel. He was a miracle of wisdom. No one is ever so wise in the conduct of his friends' affairs as he who has wrecked his own. Have we not seen farseeing and prudent ministers of state, who have conducted the business of the nation with skill and success, yet cannot manage their own far more simple business ?

Mrs. Esther talked to no one but to him about the past. She had no secrets from him. She even wished him, if possible, to share in her good fortune, and wanted him to appease his creditors with half of all that was hers. But he refused.

'My imprisonment,' he said, 'is also my freedom. While I am lying in the Fleet I can go abroad as I please; I fear no arrest: my conscience does not reproach me when I pass a shop and think of what I owe the tradesman who keeps it, because my creditors have paid themselves by capture of my body. Your purse, dear madam, were it ten times as long, would not appease the hungry maw of all my creditors and lawyers. Of old, before I took refuge among the offal and off-scouring of humanity, the prodigal sons, and the swine, there was no street west of Temple Bar where I did not fear the voice of a creditor or expect the unfriendly shoulder-tap of a bailiff. Besides, were I free, what course would be open to me? Now I live in state, with the income of a dean: outside I should live in meanness, with the income of a curate. I will retire from my present position—call it cure of souls, madam—when the Church recognises merit by translating me from the Fleet market to a fat prebendal stall. And, believe me, Virtue may find a home even beside those stalls, and among those grunting swine.'

I understand now, being much older and abler to take a just view of things, that if my uncle could have obtained his discharge he would have been unwilling to take it. For, granted that he was a learned and eloquent man, that he would have attracted multitudes to hear him, learning and eloquence, in the Church, do not always obtain for a clergyman the highest preferment; the doctor, who was no longer young, might have had to languish as a curate on forty or perhaps sixty pounds *per annum*, even though it became the fashion to attend his sermons. And, besides, his character was for ever gone, among his brethren of the cloth. A man who has been a Fleet parson is like one who has passed a morning in hedging and ditching. He must needs wash all over. Truly, I think that the doctor was right. To exercise the functions of his sacred calling all the morning for profit, to drink with his friends all the evening, to spend a large portion of his gains in deeds of charity and generosity among a poor, necessitous, prodigal, greedy, spendthrift, hungry, thirsty, and shameful folk, who rewarded his

liberality by a profusion of thanks, blessings, and good wishes, was more in accordance with the doctor's habits of thought. He persuaded himself, or tried to persuade others, that he was doing a good work in the morning; in the afternoon he performed works of charity; in the evening he abandoned himself to the tempter, who led him to sing, drink, and jest among the rabble rout of Comus.

One morning he bade me put on my hat and walk with him, because he had a thing to say. I obeyed with fear, being certain he was going to speak about my unknown husband.

'Girl!' he said, as we walked past the last house in Red Lion Street, and along the pathway which leads to the Foundling Hospital. 'Girl, I have to remind you and to warn you.'

I knew well what was to be the warning.

'Remember, you are now seventeen and more; you are no longer a young and silly girl, you are a young woman; thanks to your friends, you have taken the position of a young gentlewoman—even an heiress. You will soon leave this quiet lodging and go

where you will meet society and the great world; you are pretty and well-mannered; you will have beaux and gallants dangling their clouded canes at your heels and asking your favours. But you are married. Remember that: you are married. You must be careful not to let a single stain rest upon your reputation.'

'Oh, sir!' I cried, 'I have endeavoured to forget that morning. Was that marriage real? The poor young gentleman was tipsy. Can a tipsy man be married?'

'Real?' The doctor stood and gazed at me with angry eyes and puffed cheeks, so that the old terror seized me in spite of my fine frock and hoop. 'Real? Is the girl mad? Am I not Gregory Shovel, Doctor of Divinity of Christ's College, Cambridge? Not even the King's most sacred Majesty is married in more workmanlike fashion. Let your husband try to escape the bond. Know that he shall be watched; let him try to set it aside: he shall learn by the intervention of learned lawyers, if he do not trust my word, that he is as much married as St. Peter himself.'

'Alas!' I said. 'But how shall my husband love me?'

'Tut! tut! what is love? You young people think of nothing but love—the fond inclination of one person for another. Are you a pin the worse, supposing he never loves you? Love or no love, make up thy mind, child, that happy shall be thy lot. Be contented, patient, and silent. When the right day comes, thou shall step forth to the world as Catherine, Lady Chudleigh.'

That day he said no more to me. But he showed that the subject was not out of his thoughts by inquiries into the direction and progress of my studies, which, he hinted, should be such as would befit my rank and position. Madam thought he meant my rank as her heiress, a position which could not be illustrated with too much assiduity.

Soon after we went to Red Lion Street, my uncle gave madam my bag of guineas.

'Here is the child's fortune,' he said. 'Let her spend it, but with moderation, in buying the frocks, fal-lals, and trifles which a young gentlewoman of fortune should wear. Grudge not the spending. Should more be

wanting, more shall be found. In everything, my dear lady, make my niece an accomplished woman, a woman of *ton*, a woman who can hold her own, a woman who can go into any society, a woman fit to become the wife—well—the wife of a lord.'

It was on New Year's Day that we left the Fleet; it was in the summer, at the end of June, when we decided that enough had been done to rub off the rust of that unfashionable place.

'You, my dear,' said Mrs. Esther, 'have the sprightly graces of a well-born and well-bred young woman: I can present you in any society. I, for my part, have recovered the Pimpernel Manner. I can now make an appearance worthy of my father.'

I assured my kind lady that although, to be sure, I had never been able to witness the great original and model from which the Pimpernel Manner was derived, yet that no lady had so fine an air as herself; which was certainly true, madam being at once dignified and gifted with a formal condescension very pretty and uncommon.

CHAPTER II.

HOW WE WENT TO THE WELLS.

Access to the polite world is more readily gained (by those who have no friends) at one of the watering-places than in London. Considering this, we counselled whether it would not be better to visit one, or all, of the English Spas, rather than to climb slowly and painfully up the ladder of London fashion.

Mrs. Esther at first inclined to Bath, which certainly (though it is a long journey thither) is a most stately city, provided with every requisite for comfort, possessing the finest assembly-rooms and the most convenient lodgings. It also affords opportunities for making the acquaintance and studying the manners of the Great. Moreover, there can be no doubt that its waters are efficient in the cure

of almost all disorders ; and the social enjoyment of the hot bath, taken in the company of the wits and toasts who go to be parboiled together in that liquid Court of scandal, chocolate, and sweets, is surely a thing without a rival.

On the other hand, Tunbridge Wells is nearer London ; the roads are good ; a coach reaches the place in one day ; and, so amazing is the rapidity of communication (in which we so far excel our ancestors), that the London morning papers reach the Wells in the evening, and a letter posted from the Wells in the morning can be answered in the following evening. Also the air is fine at Tunbridge, the waters wholesome, and the amusements are said to be varied. Add to this that it is greatly frequented by the better sort of London citizens, those substantial merchants with their proud and richly dressed wives and daughters, whom Mrs. Esther always looked upon as forming the most desirable company in the world. So that it was at first resolved to go to Tunbridge.

But while we were making our preparations to go there, a curious longing came

upon Mrs. Esther to revisit the scenes of her youth.

'My dear,' she said, 'I should like to see once more the Wells of Epsom, whither my father carried us every year when we were children. The last summer I spent there was after his death, in the dreadful year of 1720, when the place was crowded with Germans, Jews, and the people who flocked to London with schemes which were to have made all our fortunes, but which only ruined us, filled the prisons and madhouses, drove honest men upon the road and their children to the gutters. Let us go to Epsom.'

Epsom Wells, to be sure, was no longer what it had been. Indeed, for a time, the place had fallen into decay. Yet of late, with their horse-racing in April and June, and the strange repute of the bone-setter Sally Wallin, the salubrity of the air on the Downs, the easy access to the town, which lieth but sixteen miles or thereabouts from Paul's, and the goodness of the lodgings, the fame of the place had revived. The gentry of the country-side came to the Monday breakfasts and assemblies, when there was

music, card-playing, and dancing; the old buildings were again repaired, and Epsom Wells for a few years was once more crowded. To me, as will presently be very well understood, the place will ever remain a dear romantic spot, sacred to the memory of the sweetest time in a woman's life, when her heart goes out of her keeping, and she listens with fear and delight to the wooing of the man she loves.

We went there in the coach, which took about three hours. We arrived in the afternoon of a sunny day—it was a Friday, which is an unlucky day to begin a journey upon—in the middle of July. We were presently taken to a neat and clean lodging in Church Parade, where we engaged rooms at a moderate charge. The landlady, one Mrs. Crump, was the widow, she told us of a respectable hosier of Cheapside, who had left her with but a slender stock. Her children, however, were in good service and thriving; and, with her youngest daughter, Cicely, she kept this lodging-house, a poor but genteel mode of earning a livelihood.

The first evening we sat at home until

sunset, when we put on our hoods and walked under the trees which everywhere at Epsom afford a delightful shade during the heat of the day, and a romantic obscurity in the twilight. A lane or avenue of noble lime-trees was planted in the Church Parade. Small avenues of trees led to the houses, and formed porches with rich canopies of green leaves. There was a good deal of company abroad, and we could hear, not far off, the strains of the music to which they were dancing in the Assembly Rooms.

'We have done well, Kitty,' said Mrs. Esther, 'to come to this place, which is far less changed than since last I came here. I trust it is not sinful to look back with pleasure and regret on the time of youth.' Here she sighed. 'The good woman of the house, I perceive with pleasure, remembers the name of Pimpernel, and made me a becoming courtesy when I informed her of my father's rank. She remembers seeing his Lord Mayor's Show. There are, it appears, many families of the highest distinction here, with several nabobs, rich Turkey and Russian merchants, great lawyers, and county gentry.

She assures me that all are made welcome, and that the assemblies are open to the whole company. And she paid a tribute to thy pretty face, my dear.'

In the morning we were awakened, to our surprise and delight, by a delectable concert of music, performed for us, by way of salutation or greeting, by the band belonging to the place. They played, in succession, a number of the most delightful airs, such as, 'A-hunting we will go,' 'Fain I would,' 'Spring's a-coming,' 'Sweet Nelly, my heart's delight,' and 'The girl I left behind me.' The morning was bright, and a breeze came into my open window from the Surrey Downs, fresh and fragrant with the scent of wild flowers. My brain was filled with the most ravishing ideas, though I knew not of what.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Esther, at breakfast, 'the compliment of the music shows the discernment of the people. They have learned already that we have pretensions to rank, and are no ordinary visitors, not haberdashers' daughters or grocers'.'

(It is, we afterwards discovered, the rule of the place thus to salute new comers, without

inquiry at all into their rank or fortune. We rewarded the players with half-a-crown from madam, and two shillings from myself.)

It is, surely, a delightful thing to dress one's self in the morning to the accompaniment of sweet music. If I were a queen, I would have a concert of music every day, to begin when I put foot out of bed : to sing in tune while putting on one's stockings : to dance before the glass while lacing one's stays : to handle a comb as if it was a fan, and to brush one's hair with a swimming grace, as if one was doing a minuet, while the fiddles and the flutes and the hautboys are playing for you. Before I had finished dressing, however, Cicely Crump, who was a lively, sprightly girl, with bright eyes and little nose, about my own age, came to help me, and told me that those ladies who went abroad to take the air before breakfast wore in the morning an easy dishabille, and advised me to tie a hood beneath the chin.

'But not,' she said with a laugh, 'not to hide too much of your face. What will they say to such a face at the ball?'

We followed her advice, and presently

sallied forth. Although it was but seven o'clock, we found a goodly assemblage already gathered together upon the Terrace, where, early as it was, the shade of the trees was agreeable as well as beautiful. The ladies, who looked at us with curiosity, were dressed much like ourselves, and the gentlemen wore morning-gowns, without swords: some of the elder men even wore nightcaps, which seemed to me an excessive simplicity. Everybody talked to his neighbour, and there was a cheerful buzz of conversation.

'Nothing is changed, my dear,' said Mrs. Esther, looking about her with great satisfaction; 'nothing except the dresses, and these not so much as we might have expected. I have been asleep, dear, like the Beauty in the story, for thirty years. But she kept her youth, that lucky girl, while I—heigh-ho!'

Cicely came with us to show us the way. We went first along the Terrace and then to the New Parade, which was also beautifully shaded with elms and limes. Between them lies the pond, with gold and silver fish, very pretty to look at, and the tumble-down watch-

house at one end. Then she showed us the pump-room.

'Here is the spring,' she said, 'which cures all disorders: the best medicine in the world.'

There was in the room a dipper, as they call the women who hand the water to those who go to drink it. We were told that it was customary to pay our footing with half-a-crown; but we drank none of the water, which is not, like that of Tunbridge Wells, sweet and pleasant to the taste. Then Cicely led us to another building hard by, a handsome place, having a broad porch with columns, very elegant. This, it appeared, was the Assembly Room, where were held the public balls, concerts, and breakfasts. We entered and looked about us. Mrs. Esther recalled her triumphs in this very room, and shed a tear over the past. Then a girl accosted us, and begged permission to enter our names in a great book. This (with five shillings each by way of fees) made us free of all the entertainments of the season.

Near the Assembly Rooms was the coffee-house, used only by the gentlemen.

'They pretend,' said Cicely, 'to come here

for letter-writing and to read the news. I do not know how many letters they write, but I do know what they talk about, because I had it of the girl who pours out their coffee, and it is not about religion, nor politics, but all about the toast of the day.'

'What is the toast of the day?' I asked.

Cicely smiled, like a saucy baggage as she was, and said that no doubt Miss Kitty would soon find out. 'Already,' she said, 'Mr. Walsingham is looking at you.'

I saw an old gentleman already dressed for the morning, with lace ruffles and a handkerchief for the neck of rich crimson silk, who sat on one of the benches beneath the trees, his hands upon a stick, looking at me with a sort of earnestness.

'Hush!' cried Cicely, whispering; 'he is more than eighty years of age: he goes every year to Epsom, Bath, and Tunbridge—all three—and he can tell you the name of the toast in every place for fifty years, and describe her face.'

A 'toast,' then, was another word for a young lady.

As we passed his bench, the old gentleman

rose and bowed with great ceremony to madam.

'Your most obedient servant, madam,' he said, still looking at me. 'I trust that the Wells will be honoured by your ladyship with a long stay. My name is Walsingham, madam, and I am not unknown here. Permit me to offer my services to you and to your lovely daughter.'

'My niece, sir.' Madam returned the bow with a curtsey as deep. 'My niece, Miss Kitty Pleydell. We arrived last night, and we expect to find our stay so agreeable as to prolong it.'

'The Wells, madam, will be delighted.' He bowed again. 'I hope to be of assistance—some little assistance—in making your visit pleasant. I have known Epsom Wells, and, indeed, Bath and Tunbridge as well, for fifty years. Every year has been made remarkable in one of these places, by the appearance of at least one beautiful face: sometimes there has been even three or four, so that gentlemen have been divided in opinion. In 1731, for instance, a duel was fought at Tunbridge Wells, between my Lord Tan-

gueray and Sir Humphrey Lydgate about two rival beauties. Generally, however, the Wells acknowledge but one queen. Yesterday I was publicly lamenting that we had as yet no one at Epsom whom we could hope to call Queen of the Wells. Miss Kitty Pleydell'—again he bowed low—'I can make that complaint no longer. I salute your Majesty.'

'Oh, sir,' I said, abashed and confused, 'you are jesting with me!'

He replied gravely, that he never jested on so serious a subject as the beauty of a woman. Then he hoped to see us again upon the Terrace or on the Downs in the course of the day, and left us with a low bow.

'I told you, miss,' said Cicely, 'that it would not be long before you found out what is meant by a toast.'

She next took us to a bookshop, where we learned that for a crown we could carry home any book we pleased from the shop and read it at our ease; only that we must return it in as good condition as we took it out, which seems reasonable. The people in the shop, as are all the people at Epsom, were mighty civil; and madam, partly with a view of

showing the seriousness of her reading, took down a volume of sermons, which I carried home for her.

Next day, however, she exchanged this for a volume of 'Pamela,' which now began to occupy our attention almost as much as 'Clarissa' had done, but caused fewer tears to flow. Now is it not a convenient thing for people who cannot afford to buy all that they would read, thus to pay a subscription and to borrow books as many as they wish? I think that nothing has ever yet been invented so excellent for the spread of knowledge and the cultivation of taste. Yet it must not go too far either; for should none but the libraries buy new novels, poems, and other works of imagination, where would be the reward of the ingenious gentlemen who write them? No; let those who can afford buy books: let those who cannot, buy all they can, and join the library for those they cannot afford to buy. What room looks more comfortably furnished than one which has its books in goodly rows upon the shelves? They are better than pictures, better than vases, better than plates, better than china

monkeys; for the house that is so furnished need never feel the dulness of a rainy day.

There remained but two subscriptions to pay before our footing was fairly established.

The leader of the music presented himself, bowing, with his subscription-book in his hand. The usual amount was half a guinea. Madam gave a guinea, being half for herself and half for me, writing down our names in the book. I saw, as we came away, that a little group of gentlemen quickly gathered round the leader and almost tore the book from his hand.

'They are anxious to find out your name, miss,' said Cicely. 'Then they will go away and talk in the coffee-house, and wonder who you are and whence you came and what fortune you have. Yet they call us women gossips!'

Lastly, there was the clergyman's book.

'Heaven forbid,' said madam, 'that we pay for the music and let the prayers go starving!'

This done, we could return home, having fairly paid our way for everything, and we

found at our lodgings an excellent country breakfast of cream, new-laid eggs, fresh wild strawberries from Durdans Park, delicate cakes of Mrs. Crump's own baking, and chocolate, with Cicely to wait upon us.

It was the godly custom of the place to attend public worship after breakfast, and at the ringing of the bell we put on our hats and went to the parish church, where we found most of the ladies assembled. They were escorted to the doors of the sacred house by the gentlemen, who left them there. Why men (who are certainly greater sinners, or sinners in a bolder and more desperate fashion than women) should have less need of prayers than we, I know not; nor why a man should be ashamed of doing what a woman glories in doing. After their drinkings, their duels, their prodigalities, and wastefulness, men should methinks crowd into the doors of every church they can find, women leading them thereto. But let us not forget that men, when they live outside the fashion and are natural, are by the bent of their mind generally more religiously disposed than women: and, as they make

greater sinners, so also do they make more illustrious saints.

When we came out of the church (I forgot to say that we were now dressed and ready to make as brave a show as the rest) we found outside the doors a lane of gentlemen, who, as we passed, bowed low, hat in hand. At the end stood old Mr. Walsingham.

He stood with his hat raised high in air, and a smile upon his lined and crowsfooted face.

'What did I say, Miss Kitty?' he whispered. 'Hath not the Queen of the Wells arrived?'

I do not know what I might have said, but I heard a cry of 'Kitty! Kitty!' and, looking round, saw—oh, the joy!—none other than my Nancy, prettier than ever, though still but a little thing, who ran up to me and threw herself in my arms.

CHAPTER III.

HOW NANCY RECKONED UP THE COMPANY.

NANCY LEVETT herself, pretty and merry, prattling, rattling Nancy, not grown a bit, and hardly taller than my shoulder. I held her out at arm's length.

'You here, Nancy?'

Then we kissed again.

'And not a bit changed, Nancy!'

'And oh! so changed, Kitty. So tall and grand. Come to my mother.'

Lady Levett was standing close by with Sir Robert, who took me by the shoulders and kissed my cheeks, forehead and lips in fatherly fashion.

'Gadso!' he cried. 'This is brave indeed. Things are likely to go well at Epsom. We have got back our Kitty, wife.'

Lady Levett was colder. Perhaps she had misgivings on what had been done with me for the last twelvemonth. And then I, who had gone away a simple, rustic maid, was now in hoops, patches and powder.

'Kitty will tell us presently,' she said, 'I doubt not, what she has done, and under whose protection she is travelling.'

Then I hastened to present Mrs. Esther, who stood aside, somewhat embarrassed.

'Madam,' I said, 'I present to you my benefactress and guardian, Mrs. Esther, to whose care I was entrusted by my uncle. Dear aunt, this is my Lady Levett. Mrs. Esther Pimpernel, Madam, hath done me the singular kindness of calling me her niece.'

'My niece and daughter by adoption,' said that kind lady. 'Your ladyship will be pleased, out of your goodness of heart, to hear the best report of this dear child's health and conduct. The good principles, my lady, which she learned of you and of her lamented father, have borne fruit in virtues of obedience and duty.'

Both ladies made a deep reverence. Then said Lady Levett:

'I assure you, my dear madam, I looked for nothing less in this dear child. From such a father as was hers, could ought but good descend? Madam, I desire your better acquaintance. For Kitty's sake, I hope we may be friends.'

'Why,' said Sir Robert, 'we are friends already. Kitty, thou art grown: thou art a fine girl. I warrant we shall have breaking of hearts before all is done. Epsom Wells was never so full of gallants. Well, breaking of hearts is rare sport, and seldom hurts the men, though they make so great a coil about it in their rhymes and nonsense. But have a care, both of you: sometimes the girls get their own little cockleshells of hearts broken in earnest.'

'I should like to see the man among them all who could break my heart,' said Nancy pertly, laughing.

'Yours?' her father asked, tapping her pretty rosy cheek. 'It is such a little one, no one can find it: nevertheless, lass, it is big enough to carry all thy father's in it, big as he is.'

Then we began to ask questions all

together. I to inquire after the village and the hall, the church, the ponies, the garden, the hounds, the fruit, all the things we used to think about: and Will, they told me, was at home, but was coming to the Wells for certain races in which he would himself ride. Harry Temple was gone to London, but would perhaps come to Epsom as soon as he knew who was there. Why had I written not one single letter?

I blushed and hung my head. I could not tell the truth, for the sake of Mrs. Esther, how I was ashamed at first to speak of the place in which I found myself, and afterwards was afraid; but I should have to explain my silence.

'It was not,' I stammered, 'that I was ungrateful to your ladyship for all your kindness. But things were strange at first, and there was nothing that I could take any pleasure in telling your ladyship. And a London letter from a simple girl, who can send no news of the great world, is a worthless thing to deliver by the post.'

'Nay, child,' said Lady Levett, 'we should

not have grudged the charge for good tidings of thy welfare.'

'Our Kitty,' said Mrs. Esther, colouring a little, for it is never pleasant to help at concealing, dissembling, or falsifying things, 'has had a busy time of late. Your ladyship knows, doubtless, that her education was not completed. We have had masters and teachers of dancing, music, deportment, and the like during the last few months, and I trust that we shall find she will do credit to the instruction she has received. Meanwhile I have, for reasons which it would not interest your ladyship to learn, been living in great retirement. We had a lodging lately in Red Lion Street, not far from the Foundling Hospital, where the air is good and the situation quiet.'

We fell, presently, into a sort of procession. First went Lady Levett and Mrs. Esther (I overheard the latter speaking at length of her father, the Lord Mayor, of her grandfather, also the Lord Mayor, and of her last visit to Epsom), then came Nancy, Sir Robert, who held my hand, and myself. The music, which had stopped during prayers, began again now.

The Terrace was crowded with the visitors, and Nancy began to point them out to me as we walked along.

'Look, child—oh! how beautiful you have grown!—there is Mr. Pagoda Tree—it is really Samuel Tree, or Obadiah Tree, or, I think, Crabapple Tree, but they all call him Pagoda Tree: he has made a quarter of a million in Bengal, and is come running to Bath, Epsom and Tunbridge, in search of a wife. With all his money I, for one, would not have him, the yellow little Nabob! He has five-and-twenty blacks at his lodgings, and they say he sticks dinner-knives into them if his curry be not hot enough. There goes the Dean of St. Sepulchre's. He is come to drink the waters, which are good for a stomach enfeebled by great dinners; there is no better fox-hunter in the county, and no finer judge of port. Pity to be seventy years old when one has all the will and the power to go on doing good to the Christian Church by fox-hunting and drinking'—he was certainly a very red-faced divine, who looked as if this world was more in his thoughts than the next, where, so far as we know,

fox-hunting will not be practised and port will not be held in esteem. 'You see yonder little fribble, my dear—do not look at him, or it will make him think the better of himself; he is a haberdasher from town, who pretends to be a Templar. A fribble, Kitty—oh! you innocent, tall, beautiful creature!—a fribble is a thing made up of rags, wig, ruffles, wind, froth, amber cane, paint, powder, coat-skirts and sword. Nothing else, I assure you. No brains, no heart, no ears, no taste, nothing. There are many fribbles at the Wells, who will dance with you, talk to you, and—if you have enough money—would like to run away with you. Don't throw yourself away on a fribble, Kitty. And don't run away with anybody. Nothing so uncomfortable.'

'That gallant youth in the red-coat is an officer, who had better be with his colours in America than showing his scarlet at the Wells. Yet he is a pretty fellow, is he not? Here are more clergymen——' One of them somewhat reminded me of my uncle, for he wore, like him, a full wig, a cassock of silk, and a flowing gown; also, he carried his head with the assurance which belongs to one who

is a teacher of men, and respects his own wisdom. But he differed from my uncle in being sleek, which the famous Chaplain of the Fleet certainly was not. He dropped his eyes as he went, inwardly rapt, no doubt, by heavenly thoughts.

'That,' Nancy went on, 'is the great Court preacher, the Reverend Bellamour Parolles, Master of Arts. The shabby divine beside him is the Vicar of Sissinghurst, in Kent, who is here to drink the waters for a complaint that troubles the poor man. What a difference!'

The country parson went dressed in a grey-striped calamanco nightgown; he wore a wig which had once been white, but was now, by the influence of this uncertain climate, turned to a pale orange; his brown hat was encompassed by a black hatband; his bands, which might have been cleaner, decently retired under the shadow of his chin; his grey stockings were darned with blue worsted. As they walked together it seemed to me that the country parson was saying to the crowd: 'You see — I am in rags; I go in darns, patches, and poverty; yet by my sacred

profession and my learning, I am the equal of my brother in silk.' While the more prosperous one might have been thought to say: 'Behold the brotherhood and equality of the Church, when I, the great and fashionable, know no difference between myself and my humble brethren!'

In the afternoon and evening there was, however, this difference, that the town parson was seen at the Assembly Rooms among the ladies, while his country brother might have been seen at the Crown, over a pipe and a brown George full of strong October.

Then Nancy went on to point out more of the visitors. There were merchants, well known on the Royal Exchange; courtiers from St. James's; country gentlemen, with their madams, brave in muslin pinners and sarsnet hoods, from estates remote from the great town, where they had never ceased to consider themselves the feudal lords of the people as well as the land: there were younger sons full of talk about horses and hounds: there were doctors in black, with bag-wigs: there were lawyers in vacation, their faces as full of sharpness as is the face of a fox: there

were young fellows not yet launched upon the fashionable world, who looked on with the shyness and impudence of youth, trying to catch the trick of dress, manner and carriage which marks the perfect beau : there were old fellows, like Mr. Walsingham, who sat on the benches, or ran about, proud of their activity, in attendance on the ladies. It was indeed a motley crew.

'They say that Epsom has come into fashion again,' Nancy went on. 'I know not. Tunbridge is a dangerous rival. Yet this year the place is full. That young man coming to speak to me you may distinguish by your acquaintance, my dear.'

What a distinction! 'He is—I hope your lordship is well this morning—he is the young Lord Eardisley, whose father is but just dead. He is a Virginian by birth, and all his fortune, with which the family estates have been recovered, was made by tobacco on his plantations. He has hundreds of negro slaves, besides convicts. Yet he is of grave and serious disposition, and abhors the smell of a pipe. Peggy Baker thinks to catch his lordship. Yet coronets are not so easily won.'

She stopped again to speak to some ladies of her acquaintance.

'Well, my dear, as for our manner of life here, it is the same as at all watering-places. We dress and undress: we meet at church, and on the Terrace and the New Parade, and the Assembly Rooms: we go to the Downs to see races before dinner and after dinner: we talk scandal: we say wicked things about each other: we try to catch the eyes of the men: we hate each other with malice and uncharitableness: we raffle: we gamble: we listen to the music: we exchange pretty nothings with the beaux: we find out all the stories about everybody here: and we dance at the Assembly.'

She stopped to breathe.

'This is a rattle,' said Sir Robert, 'which never stops—like the clack of the water-wheel. Go on, Nan.'

'One of our amusements,' she went on, tossing her little head, 'is to buy strawberries, cherries, vegetables, salad, fowls and ducks of the higglers who bring them to the market, or carry them round to the houses of the town. The gentlemen, I observe,

derive a peculiar satisfaction in chucking those of the higglers who are young and good-looking under the chin. This, I confess, is a pleasure which I cannot for my own part understand.'

'Saucy baggage!' said her father.

'You and I, Kitty,' she continued, 'who do not want to chuck farmers' daughters under the chin, may, when we are tired of the races or the promenade, take an airing in a coach, or watch the raffling, or the card-players. Here they play cards all day long, except on Sunday. Or we may go to the book-shop and hear the latest scandal: or we may go home and trim our own things and talk about frocks, and patches, and poetry, and lace, and lovers. But, for Heaven's sake, Kitty, do not, in this censorious place, make that pretty face too cheap, and let no one follow you on the Terrace but the best of the company.'

'Good advice,' said Sir Robert. 'This girl of mine has got her father's head.'

'As for cards,' Nancy went on, taking no notice of her father's interruption, 'the tables are always laid in the Assembly Room: the

ladies mostly play at quadrille, and the gentlemen at whist; but there are tables for hazard, lansquenet, faro, and baccarat, where all comers are welcome, provided they have got money to lose and can lose it without also losing their temper, a thing we women throw away daily, and lose without regarding it, so cheap and abundant a commodity it is. My dear, so long as I value my face, I will never touch the odious delightful things. Yet the joy of winning your enemy's money! Oh! oh! And the dreadful grief to lose your own!

'There is a concert this evening. I would not advise you to attend it, but to wait for Monday's ball — there to make your first appearance. I shall go, because some of my swains are going to play with the paid musicians; and of course I look to see them break down and spoil the whole music, to their great confusion.

'But Monday — Monday is our day of days. All Sunday we think about it, and cannot say our prayers for thinking of the dear delightful day. And what the clergy-

man preaches about none of us know, for wishing the day was here. On Monday we have a great public breakfast to begin with: the gentry come to it from all the country-side, with the great people from Durdans: in fine weather we breakfast under the trees upon the Terrace while the music plays. You will find it pleasant to take your chocolate to the strains of flute and clarionet, French horn and hautboy: the sunshine raises the spirits, and the music fills the head with pretty fancies. Besides, every girl likes to be surrounded by tall fellows who, though we care not a pin for one of them, are useful for providing conversation, cakes, and creams, telling stories, saying gallant things, fetching, carrying, and making Peggy Baker jealous. On Monday, too, there are always matches on the Downs: we pretend to be interested in the horses: we come back to dinner and a concert: in the afternoon, some of the gentlemen give tea and chocolate; and at six o'clock, the fiddles tune up — oh, the delicious scraping!—we all take our places: and then begins—oh! oh! oh!—the dear, delightful ball! My child, let Miss Peggy

Baker dress her best, put on her finest airs, and swim about with her most languishing sprawl, I know who shall outshine her, and be the Queen of the Wells.'

'Yourself, dear Nancy?'

'No; not myself, dear Nancy,' she replied, imitating. 'Oh! you well may blush for shame, pretty hypocrite! 'Tis yourself, dear Kitty, that I mean. You shall burst upon their astonished gaze like Venus rising from the sea in our picture at home, only better dressed than that poor creature!'

Just then a young lady, with the largest hoop I had ever seen, with patches and powder, and accompanied by three or four gentlemen, came slowly along the walk. As she drew near she looked at me with curiosity. She was a tall girl—nearly as tall as myself—with features rather larger than ordinary, and as she moved I understood what Nancy meant by languishing and swimming.

Nancy ran to meet her, taking her by both hands, and affecting a mighty joy.

'Dear Miss Peggy,' she began, 'I am charmed to see you looking so well, and

lovely. How that dress becomes your shape! with what an air sits that hat!'

'Oh, Miss Nancy!' Miss Peggy swam and languished, agitating her fan and half shutting her eyes, which were very large and limpid.

'Praise from such a judge of beauty and dress as yourself is rare indeed. What should we poor women do without the discrimination of our own sex? Men have no discernment. A well-dressed woman and a draggle-tail are all one to them.'

'Not all men, dear Miss Peggy,' continued Nancy, her eyes sparkling. 'Mr. Walsingham was only saying this morning that you are, like himself, a proof of the salubrity of the Wells, since it is now the fifth season——'

'The third, dear child,' Miss Peggy interrupted, with a tap of her fan on Nancy's knuckles—indeed, she deserved it. 'I am very much obliged to Mr. Walsingham, whose tongue is free with all the ladies at the Wells. It is but yesterday since he said of you——'

'This is my friend, Miss Kitty Pleydell,' said Nancy quickly, rubbing her knuckles.

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'Kitty, my dear, you have heard of the beautiful Peggy Baker, last year the Toast of Tunbridge Wells, and the year before the Toast of Bath. Up to the present she has been our pride. On Monday evening you shall see her in her bravest attire, the centre of attraction, envied by us poor homely creatures, who have to content ourselves with the rustic beaux, the parsons, the lawyers, and the half-pay officers.'

Now, whether this artful girl did it on purpose, or whether it was by accident, I know not: but every word of this speech contained an innuendo against poor Miss Peggy. For it was true that she had been for two years following a Toast, but she was still unmarried, and without a lover, though she had so many men for ever in her train; and it was also true that among her courtiers at Epsom, the little band who held back while the ladies talked, there were, as I afterwards learned, at least three rustic beaux, two lawyers, a fashionable parson, and six half-pay officers. However, she disguised whatever resentment she might have felt, very kindly bade me welcome to the

Wells, hoped that I should enjoy the place, told Nancy that her tongue ran away with her, and that she was a saucy little baggage, tapped her knuckles for the second time with her fan, and moved away.

When Nancy had finished telling me of the amusements of the place and the people—I omit most of what she said as to the people because, although doubtless true, the stories did not redound to their credit, and may now very well be forgotten—we left the Terrace, Sir Robert now joining madam, and looked at the stalls and booths which were ranged along the side. They were full of pretty things exhibited for sale, and instead of rude 'prentice boys for salesmen there were good-looking girls, with whom some of the gentlemen were talking and laughing.

'More chin-chucking, my dear,' said Nancy.

It was the fashion to have a lottery at almost every stall, so that when you bought anything you received a ticket with your purchase, which entitled you to a chance of the prize. When you chose a bottle of scent, the girl who gave it you handed with it a

ticket which gave one the chance of winning five guineas: with a pair of stockings came a ticket for a ten-guinea lottery. It was the same thing with all the shops. A leg of mutton bought at the butcher's might procure for the purchaser the sum of twenty guineas; the barber who dressed your hair presented you with a chance for his five-guinea draw: the very taverns and ordinaries had their lotteries, so that for every sixpenny plate of boiled beef a 'prentice had his chance with the rest, and might win a guinea: you ordered a dozen oysters, and they came with the fishmonger's compliments and a ticket for his lottery, the first prize of which would be two guineas, the drawing to take place on such a day, with auditors appointed to see all fair, and school children named to pull out the tickets: even the woman who sold apples and cherries in a basket loudly bellowed along the street that she had a half-crown draw, a five-shilling draw, and so on. Every one of us treasured up the tickets, but I never met any who won. Yet we had the pleasure of attending the drawing, dreaming of lucky numbers, and spending our prizes

beforehand. I am sure that Nancy must have spent in this way many hundreds of pounds during the season, and by talking over all the fine things she would buy, the way in which their exhibition upon her little figure would excite the passion of envy in the breast of Peggy Baker and others, and her own importance thus bedecked, she had quite as much pleasure out of her imaginary winnings as if they had been real ones. It is a happy circumstance for mankind that they are able to enjoy what they never can possess, and to be, in imagination, the great, the glorious, the rich, the powerful personages which they can never, in the situation wherein Providence has placed them, hope to become.

Presently we went home to dinner, which was served for us by Cicely Crump. After dinner, while Mrs. Esther dozed, Cicely told me her history. Her father, she said, had been a substantial tradesman in Cheapside, and though little of stature, was in his youth a man of the most determined courage and resolution. When only just out of his apprenticeship he fell in love with a beautiful

young lady named Jenny Medlicott (daughter of the same Alderman Medlicott whose ruin brought poor Mrs. Esther to destruction): as he knew that he could never get the consent of the alderman, being poor and of obscure birth, and knowing besides that all is fair in love, this lad of mettle represented himself to his nymph as a young gentleman of the Temple, son of a country squire. In this disguise he persuaded her to run away with him, and they were married. But when they returned to London they found that the alderman was ruined, and gone off his head. Therefore they separated, the lady going to Virginia with Lady Eardesley, mother of the young lord now at Epsom, and the husband going back to the shop. After the death of poor Jenny he married again. 'And,' said Cicely, 'though my mother is no gentlewoman, one cannot but feel that she might have been Miss Jenny Medlicott herself had things turned out differently. And that makes all of us hold up our heads. And as for poor father, he never forgot his first wife, and was always pleased to relate how he ran away with her all the way to Scotland,

armed to the teeth, and ready, for her sake, to fight a dozen highwaymen. Such a resolute spirit he had!'

Then Nancy Levett came, bringing with her a milliner, Mrs. Bergamot.

'Kitty,' she cried, 'I cannot rest for thinking of your first ball, and I have brought you Mrs. Bergamot to advise. My dear, you *must* be well dressed.' Then she whispered: 'Do you want money, dear? I have some.'

I told her I had as much as a hundred and twenty guineas, at which she screamed with delight.

'Kitty!' she cried again, clasping my hands. 'A hundred guineas! a hundred guineas! and twenty more! My dear, that odd twenty, that poor overflowing of thy rich measure is the utmost I could get for this season at the Wells. Oh! happy, happy girl, to have such a face, such a shape, such eyes, such hair, such hands and feet, and a hundred and twenty guineas to set all off!'

She sat down, clasped her hands, and raised her eyes to heaven as if in thankfulness. I think I see her now, the little

dainty merry maid, so arch, so apt, sitting before me with a look which might be of envy or of joy. She had eyes so bright, a mouth so little, dimples so cunning, a cheek so rosy and a chin so rounded that one could not choose but love her.

'Miss Pleydell,' she said to the milliner, 'has not brought all her things from London. You must get what she wants at once, for Monday's ball. Now, let us see.'

Then we held a parliament of four, counting Cicely, over the great question of my frocks. Nancy was prime minister, and did all the talking, turning over the things.

'Let me see, Mrs. Bergamot. Fetch us, if you have them—what you have—in flowered brocades—all colours—violet, pink, Italian posies, rose, myrtle, jessamine, anything; a watered tabby would become you, Kitty; any painted lawns,—silks and satins would be almost too old for you: do not forget the patches *à la grecque*—Kitty, be very careful of the patches; gauzes, what you have, Mrs. Bergamot; we want more hoods, a feathered muff, stomacher, Paris nets, *eau de Chypre* or *eau de luce*, whichever you have; ear-

rings are no use to you, my poor child. Pity that they did not pierce your ears: see the little drops dangling at mine. At any rate, thank Heaven that we neither of us want vermilion for the cheeks. Poor Peggy! she paints these two years and more. Ruffs, Mrs. Bergamot, and tippets, cardinals, any pretty thing in sarsnets, and what you have in purple. Kitty, purple is your colour. You shall have a dress all purple for the next ball. Ah! if I could carry purple! But you, Kitty, with your height and figure—stand up, child—why, she will be Juno herself!'

'Truly,' said the dressmaker, 'as for Miss Pleydell, purple has come into fashion in pudding-time, as folk say.'

'A pretty woman,' Nancy went on, examining me as if I had been a dummy, 'not a pretty "little thing" like me, is as rare in Epsom as a black swan or a white blackbird, or green yellow-hammer, or a red blue-tit.'

When the dressmaker was gone, and we were left alone, Nancy began again, out of her great experience, to talk of the place we were in.

'My dear,' she said, 'before one's father

one cannot say all that one would wish'—could such wisdom be possible at seventeen-and-a-half? 'This is a very shocking and wicked place; we used to be taught that girls ought to sit in a corner, after they had put on their best things, and wait to be spoken to, and not to think about attracting the men; and not, indeed, to think about the men at all, save in their own room, where they might perhaps pray that if there was any men in the world not addicted to gambling, drinking, cursing, hunting, fighting, and striking, those men might be led by Heaven to cast eyes of love upon them. Oh!'—here she held up her hands and shook her head just like a woman four times her age, and steeped in experience—'in this place it is not long that the girls sit in a corner, and, indeed, I do not greatly love corners myself; but the very wives, the matrons, the married women, my dear,'—her voice rose with each word till it had mounted nearly to the top of the possible scale,—'are coquettes, who interfere with the girls, and would have the gallants dangling at their heels. As for their husbands, they are the last persons con-

sidered worthy of their notice; they put on their dresses and deck themselves out to please anybody rather than the persons whom it should be their only study to please.'

'Nancy,' I whispered, 'when you are married, will you never, never dress to please anybody but your husband?'

'Why,' she replied, 'my father, my mother, my children (if I have any), my friends will be pleased to see me go fine. But not for lovers—oh!'

We agreed that would-be lovers should be received and properly dealt with before marriage.

'Bashfulness, here,' continued the pretty moralist, 'is — Heaven help us! — lack of breeding; what goes down is defiance of manners and modesty. Propriety is laughed at; noise is wit; laughter is repartee; most of the women gamble; nearly all are in debt; nobody reads anything serious; and we backbite each other perpetually.'

I know not what had put her in so strange a mood for moralising.

'However,' she said, 'now that you are come, we shall get on better. I have made

up my mind that you are to be the Toast of the season. I shall set you off, because you are brown and I am fair ; you are tall, and I am short ; you are grave, and I am merry ; you are thoughtful, and I am silly ; you have brown eyes, and I have blue. We will have none but the best men about us ; we will set such an example as will shame the hoydens of girls and tame the Mohocks among the men. Miss Lamb of Hackney, who thinks herself a beauty, will then be ashamed to jump about and scream at the Assembly with nothing over her skinny shoulders. Peggy Baker shall have after her none but the married men (who are of no possible use except to spoil a girl's reputation), although she sighs and swims and sprawls with her eyes half shut. Do you know that she sat for her portrait to Zincke, at Marylebone Gardens, as Anne Boleyn, and was painted with eyelashes down to the corners of her mouth ?'

'Nancy,' I cried, 'you are jealous of Miss Peggy Baker.'

She laughed, and talked of something else. From this I conjectured that Peggy had said or reported something which offended

her. What had really been said, I learned afterwards, was that Nancy was running after Lord Eardesley, which was unkind as well as untrue.

'Last year,' she said, 'after you went away, nothing would serve my mother but a visit to Bath. It is not so gay as Tunbridge Wells, because the company are mostly country folk, like ourselves, who stand upon their dignity; but it is better than this place, where there are so many London cits that it passes one's patience, sometimes, to see their manners'—really, Nancy must have been seriously put out. 'However, I dare say Bath is as wicked as any of the watering towns, when you come to know it. I liked the bathing. What do you think, Kitty, of everybody promenading in the water up to their chins—that is to say, the little people, like me, up to their noses (only I wore pattens to make myself higher), and the tall men up to their shoulders, in hot water? Everybody frolicking, flirting, and chattering, while japanned trays float about covered with confectionery, tea, oils, and perfumes for the ladies ; and when you go away, your chair is

nothing but a tub full of hot water, in which you are carried home. We stayed there all July and August, though my mother would have kept me, if she could, from the baths till I was bigger. Harry Temple was there, too, part of the time.'

'And how doth Harry?'

'He is a good honest fellow,' said Nancy, 'though conceited and a prig; his mouth full of learned words, and his head full of books. He seemed to pine after your departure, Kitty, but soon recovered himself, and now eats and drinks again as before. He found some congenial spirits from Oxford at Bath, and they used to talk of Art, and pictures (when anyone was listening), and bronzes, and all sorts of things that we poor people know nothing of.'

Then she told me how Harry had made a poem upon me, after my departure, which he turned into Latin, Greek, and Italian, and had given Nancy a copy. And how Will had christened one pup Kitty, and another Pleydell, and a third Kitty Pleydell, and was casting around how to give a fourth puppy my name as well.

It seemed so long ago that I had almost forgotten poor rustic Will, with his red face, his short sturdy figure, and his determination.

'Dear Kitty,' said Nancy, 'if thou couldst take a fancy for our Will—he is a brave lad, though dull of parts and slow of apprehension. As for Harry'—here she stopped, and blushed.

I remembered my secret, and blushed as well (but for guilt and shame); while poor Nancy blushed in maiden modesty.

'Dear Nancy,' I replied, kissing her, 'believe me, but I could never marry your brother Will. And as for Harry——'

'As for Harry,' she echoed, with downcast eyes.

It was easy to read her secret, though she could not guess mine.

'As for Harry,' I said, 'where could he be better bestowed than——'

Here I kissed her again, and said no more, because between two women what more need be said?

Alas! I had quite forgotten—indeed, I

never suspected—that I was actually engaged to become the wife of both Harry and Will, who was at this same time the wife of Lord Chudleigh. And both men were on their way to Epsom to claim the promise.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW KITTY WENT TO HER FIRST BALL.

If I were to write all that Nancy said on Saturday afternoon it would fill a volume; and if I were to write down all that we four said about my dress for the Monday Ball, it would take four volumes at least, so nimbly ran our tongues. It was determined, however, that the purple frock should be put in hand at once, with ribbons and everything to correspond; but that for this occasion, as time pressed, we would take my best frock, a new white satin, never before worn. Mrs. Bergamot would dress me, and the hairdresser was engaged for two o'clock.

'Everything,' said Nancy, 'depends upon the first impression. Already the world is agog to see the beautiful Miss Pleydell

. As for me, my dear, nobody d my first appearance at all. And yet thought I looked very nice. To be sure, a person of my inches cannot expect to command attention. I am feeling my way, however, and though I am little, my tongue is sharp. After Monday we will have our court, you and I, to ourselves. The men will be at our feet, and Peggy may lie all on a rock deploring.'

I asked her afterwards how she could speak so openly before this milliner, who would probably tell all the town what she had said.

'My dear,' she replied sharply, 'your Nancy is not altogether a goose, and she knows what she is doing. Mrs. Bergamot is a most trustworthy person. I quite rely upon her. I have never known her fail in her duties as town-crier. She will spread it abroad that you have brought a hundred guineas and more to spend in frocks and things; she will tell everybody that you have ordered a purple velvet in the first fashion; she will not fail to repeat that you and I together mean to lead the company at

the Wells; she will probably tell Peggy that she may go and sit on a rock deploring; and she will inform Miss Lamb of Hackney that her shoulders are skinny. They cannot hate us worse than they do, therefore we will make them fear us.'

What a little spitfire was this Nancy of mine!

To the religious and the sober, Sunday is a day of serious meditation as well as of rest: to me, the Sunday before the ball was a day of such worldly tumult as should afford ample room for repentance in these later years. Unhappily, we repent but seldom of these youthful sins. Yet, when we went to church, the organ seemed to play a minuet, the hymns they sang might have been a hey or a jig in a country dance, and the sermon of the preacher might have been a discourse on the pleasures and enjoyments of the world, so rapt was my mind in contemplation of these vanities.

The service over, we walked out through a lane of the godless men who had not gone to church. Nancy came after me very demure, carrying her Prayer-book, her eyes cast

down as if rapt in heavenly meditation. But her thoughts were as worldly as my own, and she presently found an opportunity of whispering that Peggy Baker had thrown glances of the greatest ferocity from her pew at herself and me, that Mrs. Bergamot had already spread the news about, and that the concourse of men at the door of the sacred place was entirely on my account. 'If it was not Sunday,' she added, 'and if it were not for the crowd around us, I should dance and sing.'

The time for opening the ball was six, at which time dancing began, and was continued until eleven, according to the laws wisely laid down by that public benefactor and accomplished Amphitryon, Mr. Nash, who effected so much improvement for Bath and Tunbridge that his rules were adopted for all other watering-places. Before his time there were no fixed hours or fixed prices, the laws of precedence were badly observed, the gentlemen wore their swords, and disputes, which sometimes ended in duels, were frequent and unseemly. Now, however, nothing could be

more orderly than the manner of conducting the entertainment. The charge of admission was half-a-crown for gentlemen, and one shilling for ladies ; no swords were permitted, and the ball was opened by the gentleman of the highest rank in the room. At Epsom, a country squire or a city knight was generally the best that could be procured, whereas at Bath an earl was not uncommon, and even a duke was sometimes seen.

My hairdresser, who was, on these occasions, engaged from six o'clock in the morning until six in the evening, was fortunately able to give me half an hour at two o'clock, so that I had not more than four hours or so to sit without moving my head. This was a very happy circumstance, many ladies having to be dressed early in the morning, so that for the whole day they could neither walk about nor move for fear of the structure toppling over altogether. Mrs. Bergamot herself dressed me. I wore my white satin frock over a great hoop with fine new point lace for tuckers ; my kerchief and ruffles were in lace, and I had on a pearl and coral necklace, presented to me by Mrs. Esther, who

was contented to wear a black ribbon round her neck in order that I might go the finer. As for herself, she wore a rich brocade, which greatly became her and made her look like a countess.

'Nay, child,' she said, 'not a countess, but like a gentlewoman, as hath ever been my simple ambition, and the daughter of a great London merchant.'

But to think that in every house in Epsom there was one girl, at least, or perhaps two, who were spending as much time and thought as myself upon the decoration of our persons for this ball! And what chance had I of distinction among so many fine women of less rustic breeding?'

'She will do, Mrs. Bergamot, I think,' said Mrs. Esther.

'Madam,' replied the dressmaker, who no doubt considered it part of her business to flatter her customers, 'Madam, I dare swear that there hath not appeared—I do not say at Epsom alone, but at Tunbridge and at Bath—so beautiful a creature in the memory of man. Mr. Walsingham, who remembers all the beauties for fifty years, declares that

Miss Kitty surpasses all. Straight as a lance, madam, and shapely as a statue, with such a face as will deal havoc and destruction among the men.'

Mrs. Esther nodded her head and laughed. Then she shook her head and looked grave.

'We must not become vain, Kitty,' she said. 'Beauty is but skin-deep; it fades like the flowers: think only of virtue and goodness, which never fade. And yet, child, thou art young: thou art beautiful: be happy in the sunshine, as is meet. Thank Heaven for sunshine!'

She pressed my hand in hers, and the tears rose to her eyes. Was she thinking of her own youth, which had been so unhappy?

When Mrs. Bergamot left us, she confessed to me that, like me, she had been in a strange agitation of spirit at the contemplation of this assembly.

'It is thirty years,' she said, 'since I have been in a gay crowd. I thought that such a thing as the sight of youth and happiness would never come to me again. And to think that, after all these years, I should go back to the very room where, in 1720, amid a

crowd of adventurers, speculators, and gamblers, who were going to ruin us all, I attended my last ball!'

This was while we were waiting for the chairs.

'I think,' she went on, in her soft voice, which was like the rippling of a stream, 'that my child will do credit to herself. I am glad that you have kept your neck covered, my dear. I would rather see you go modest than fine. I hope that Lady Levett will be there before us. In such cases as this the sight of a friend gives us, as it were, an encouragement: it is like a prop to lean against. I hope the chairs will not be late. On the other hand, one would not, surely, arrive too early. My dear, I am trembling all over. Are you sure you have forgotten none of your steps? Ah! if no one were to ask you to dance, I should die of shame and mortification! But they will—oh! they will. My Kitty is too beautiful to sit among the crowd of lookers-on.'

Here came Cicely, running to tell us that the chairs were below, and that the men swore they could not wait.

'A minute—one minute only. Dear, dear, how quick the girl is! Cicely, take one last look at Miss Kitty. Do you think, child, she has got everything, and is properly dressed?'

'Quite properly, madam. No lady in the assembly will shine like Miss Pleydell.'

'Good girl. And, Cicely, if you see that anything is wanting in my dress, do not scruple to tell me. Young eyes are sometimes quicker than old ones.'

'Nothing, madam. Your ladyship is dressed in the fashion.'

Then the chairmen, who, like all their tribe, were unmannerly fellows, bellowed that they would wait no longer, and we descended the stairs. One would have been ashamed to confess the fact, but it actually was the very first time I had ever sat in a chair. The shaking was extremely disagreeable, and one could not, at the beginning, feel anything but pity for the poor men who made their living by carrying about the heavy bodies of people too fine or too lazy to walk. However, that feeling soon wore off: just as the West Indian and Virginian planters learn by degrees to

believe that their negro slaves like to work in the fields, are thankful for the lash, and prefer digging under a hot sun to sleeping in the shade.

We arrived at the Assembly Rooms a few minutes before six. The rooms were already crowded: the curtains were drawn, and the light of day excluded. But in its place there was a ravishing display of wax candles, arranged upon the walls on sconces, or hanging from the ceiling. The musicians in the gallery were already beginning, as is their wont, to tune their instruments, twanging and blowing, just as a preacher begins with a preliminary hem.

My eyes swam as I surveyed the brilliant gathering; for a moment I held Mrs. Esther by the wrist, and could say nothing nor move. I felt like an actress making her appearance for the first time upon the stage, and terrified, for the moment, by the faces looking up, curious and critical, from crowded pit and glittering boxes.

At that moment Lady Levett arrived with her party. I think Sir Robert saw our distress and my guardian's anxiety to appear at her ease, for he kindly took Mrs. Esther by the

hand, and led her, as if she were the greatest lady in the assembly, to the upper end, while Nancy and I followed after.

'Oh, Kitty!' she whispered; 'there is no one half so beautiful as you—no one in all the room! How the men stare! Did they never see a pretty woman before? Wait in patience for a little, ye would-be lovers, till your betters are served. Peggy Baker, my dear, you will burst with envy. Look! Here she comes, with her courtiers.'

In fact, Miss Baker herself here appeared with her mother, surrounded by three or four gentlemen who hovered about her, and she languidly advanced up the room.

She came straight to us, and, after saluting Lady Levett and Mrs. Esther, held out her hand to Nancy and curtseyed to me.

'You look charming to-night, dear Miss Nancy. That frock of yours—one is never tired of it.'

'And you—oh, dear Miss Peggy!' Nancy turned white, because her frock was really rather an old one.

'It is good wearing stuff,' said Miss Peggy. 'Yet I had thought that mode gone out.'

'So it had, my dear,' said Nancy, sharply; 'and I believe it went out five seasons ago. That is longer than I can recollect. But it has come back again. Fashions do revive, sometimes.'

This was a very ill-natured thing to say, and made poor Miss Peggy wince and colour, and she did not retaliate, because, I suppose, she could think of nothing to say.

Then old Mr. Walsingham, who had constituted himself the director of the ceremonies, appeared. He was dressed in the most beautiful crimson silk coat, lined with white, and purple waistcoat, and he came slowly up the hall, with a gentleman whose bearing was as great as his own, but whose years were less.

'It is young Lord Chudleigh,' whispered Peggy Baker, fanning herself anxiously. 'He has come from Durdans with his party.'

Lord Chudleigh!

Heavens! To meet in such a manner, in such a place, my own husband!

'What is the matter, Kitty dear?' asked Nancy. 'You turned quite pale. Bite your lips, my dear, to get the colour back.'

'It is nothing. I am faint with the heat and the lights, I suppose. Do not take notice of me.'

Peggy Baker assumed an air of languor and sensibility, which, though extremely fine, was perhaps over-acted.

'Lord Chudleigh,' she said, 'is of course the person of the highest distinction in the room. He will invite, I presume, Lady Levett to open the ball with the first minuet. If Lady Levett declines, he will be free to select another partner.'

In fact, Mr. Walsingham conducted Lord Chudleigh to Lady Levett, and presented him to her. Her ladyship excused herself on the ground that her dancing days were over, which was of course expected. His lordship then said a few words to Mr. Walsingham, who nodded, smiled, and conducted him to the little group composed of Nancy, Peggy Baker, and myself. But he presented his lordship—to me!

'Since,' he said, while the room went round with me, 'since Lady Levett will not condescend to open the ball with your lordship, I beg to present you to Miss Kitty Pleydell,

who appears to-night, for the first time, at our assembly ; and, I am assured, for the first time in any assembly. My lord, the sun, when he rises in splendour, dims the light of the moon and stars. Miss Kitty, I would I were fifty years younger, that I might challenge this happy young gentleman for the honour of the dance.'

Then Lord Chudleigh spoke. I remembered his voice : a deep shame fell upon my soul, thinking where and how I had heard that voice before.

'Miss Pleydell,' he said, bowing low, 'I humbly desire the honour of opening the ball with you.'

It was time to rally my spirits, for the eyes of all the company were upon us. There was only one thing to do—to forget for the moment what was past, and address myself to the future.

I can look back upon the evening with pride, because I remember how I was able to push away shame and remembrance, and to think, for the moment, about my steps and my partner.

Twang, twang, twang, went the fiddles.

The conductor raised his wand. The music crashed and rang about the room.

'Courage, Kitty!' whispered Nancy. 'Courage! Think you are at home.'

The hall was cleared now, and the people stood round in a triple circle, watching, while my lord, his hat beneath his arm, offered me his hand, and led me into the middle of the room.

The last things I observed as I went with him were Mrs. Esther, wiping away what looked like a little tear of pride, and Peggy Baker, with red face, fanning herself violently. Poor Peggy! Last year it was she who would have taken the place of the most distinguished lady in the company!

They told me afterwards that I acquitted myself creditably. I *would* not permit myself to think under what different circumstances that hand had once before held mine. I would not break down before the eyes of so many people, and with Peggy Baker standing by, ready to condole with me on my discomfiture. But I could not bring myself to look in the face of my partner: and that dance was accomplished with eyes down-dropped.

Oh! it was over at last; the dance which was to me the most anxious, the most delightful, the most painful, that ever girl danced in all this world! And what do you think strengthened my heart the while? It was the strangest thing: but I thought of a certain verse in a certain old history, and I repeated to myself, as one says things when one is troubled:

'Now the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight: so that he set the royal crown upon her head.'

'Child,' whispered Mrs. Esther, her face aglow with pleasure and pride, 'we are all proud of you.'

'Kitty,' said Lady Levett, who was more critical, because she knew more of the polite world, 'you acquitted yourself creditably. Next time, do not be afraid to look your partner in the face. My lord, I trust that Miss Pleydell's performance has made you congratulate yourself on my declining the honour of the minuet?'

'Your ladyship,' said Lord Chudleigh, 'may be assured that, if anything could com-

pensate for that disappointment, the grace and beauty of my fair partner have effected that object.'

'Gadzooks!' cried Sir Robert. 'Here is a beating about the bush! Kitty, my pretty maid, no duchess could have danced better, and never a queen in Christendom is more beautiful! Say I well, my lord?'

'Excellently well, Sir Robert. You have said more than I dared; not more than I thought.'

Then Mr. Walsingham came bustling to congratulate me.

'But one opinion—only one opinion, Miss Pleydell! Lady Levett, your obedient servant. Mrs. Pimpernel, I offer my congratulations on this young lady's success. I would it had been Bath, or even Tunbridge, whence the rumour of such beauty and such grace would have been more quickly carried about the country. But it will be spread abroad. There are three hundred tongues here to-night, who will talk, and three hundred pens who will write. Miss Kitty, once more I salute your Majesty—Queen of the Wells!'

Then Lord Chudleigh, and Sir Robert

Levett, and the gentlemen standing round sank on one knee and bowed almost to the ground, crying :

'Queen of the Wells! Queen of the Wells!'

And Nancy, in her pretty, saucy way, ran and stood beside me, laughing.

'And I am her Majesty's maid of honour. Remember that, gentlemen all!'

'The saucy baggage!' cried Sir Robert.

And Peggy Baker, for whom in this hour of triumph one felt a little pity, came too, with a curtsey and a smile which looked more like a frown.

'Miss Pleydell must accept my homage, too,' she said. 'We are fortunate in having one so inimitably lovely for our Queen. It makes one wonder where so much beauty could have been hidden.'

I suppose she meant this as an innuendo that I was not, therefore, accustomed to such good company. I thought of Fleet Lane and the market, and I laughed aloud.

But Lord Chudleigh was expected to dance with another lady before the ball was opened; and here was another disappointment for poor Peggy, for he led out Nancy, who

took his hand with a pride and joy which did one's heart good to look at.

If I had been afraid to raise my eyes, Nancy was not; she looked in my lord's face and laughed; she talked and prattled all the time she was dancing; and she danced as if the music was too slow for her, as if she would fain have been spinning round like a school-girl when she makes cheeses, as if her limbs were springs, as if she would gladly have taken her partner by both hands and run round and round with him as she had so often done with me when we were children together, playing in the meadows beside the Hall. All the people looked on and laughed and clapped their hands; never was so merry a minuet, if that stately dance could ever be made merry. As for me, I was able to look at his face again, though that was only to begin the punishment of my crime.

What did I remember of him? A tall young man of slender figure; with cheeks red and puffed, a forehead on which the veins stood out ready to burst, a hand that shook, eyes that looked wildly round him; a dreadful, terrible, and shameful memory. But now,

how changed! As for his features, I hardly recognised them at all. Yet I knew him for the same man.

Go get a cunning limner and painter. Make him draw you a face stamped with some degrading vice, or taken at the moment of committing some grievous sin against the conscience. Suppose, for instance, that the cheeks swell out with gluttony; or let the lips tremble with intemperance; or let the eyes grow keen and hawk-like with gambling: let any vice he pleases be stamped upon that face. Then let him go away and draw that face (which before was dark with sin and marked with the seal of the Devil) as it should be, pure, wise, and noble as God, who hath somewhere laid by the model and type of every created face, intended it to be. You will know it and you will know it not.

The face which I had seen was not the face of a drunkard, but of a drunken man, of a man heavy and stupid with unaccustomed drink. I had always thought of him as of a creature of whose violence (in his cups) I should go in daily terror, when it should please the doctor to take me to my husband.

Now that I saw the face again, the spirit of drunkenness gone out of it, it seemed as if the man could never stoop to weakness or folly, so strong were the features, so noble were the eyes. How could such a man, with such a face and such a bearing, go about with such a secret? But perhaps, like me, he did not suffer himself to think about it. For his face was as that of David when he was full of his great mission, or of Apollo the sun-god, or of Adonis whom the Syrian women weep, or of Troilus when he believed that Cressida was true.

To be sure, he never thought of the thing at all. He put it behind him as an evil dream: he would take no steps until he wished to be married, when he would instruct his lawyers, and they would break the bonds —which were no true bonds—asunder. If he thought at all, he would think that he was married—if that was indeed a marriage—to some poor unworthy wretch who might be set aside at pleasure: why should his thoughts ever dwell—so I said to myself with jealous bitterness—on the girl who stood before him for ten minutes, her face muffled in a hood,

her eyes cast down, who placed a trembling and wicked hand in his and swore to follow his fortunes for better for worse ?

Alas, poor Kitty ! Her case seemed sad indeed.

Then my lord finished his minuet with Nancy, and other couples advanced into the arena, and the dancing became general. Of course there were nothing but minuets until eight o'clock.

Nancy was merry. She said that her partner was delightful to dance with, partly because he was a lord—and a title, she said, gives an air of grace to any block—partly because he danced well and talked amiably.

'He is a pretty fellow, my dear,' she said, 'though of position too exalted for one so humble as myself. He had exhausted all his compliments upon the Queen and had none for a simple maid of honour, which I told him at parting, and it made him blush like a girl. How I love to see a man blush ; it is a sign that there is yet left some remains of grace. Perhaps Lord Chudleigh is not so hardened as his fellows. Look at Peggy's languid airs : she thinks a minuet should be

danced as if you were going to die the very next minute ; and she rolls her eyes about as if she were fainting for a man to kiss her. My dear, Lord Chudleigh, I fear, is above us both ; yet he is but a man, and all men are made of tinder, and a woman is the spark. I think he may be on fire before long. Think not upon him until you find out how his affections are disposed, and whether he is free. A roving lord, at the watering-places, who is young and handsome, is as dangerous to us poor damsels, and plays as much havoc among our hearts, as Samson when he had got that jawbone, among the Philistines. A truly dreadful thing it would be'—it was wonderful that she should be saying all this in ignorance, how every word went home—'to set your affections upon a lord, and to find out afterwards that he was pledged to somebody else. Hateful thing she would be !'

While the minuets were dancing we stood and watched the gay throng. Never had I dreamed of anything so gay and animated. There were three hundred people, at least as many men as women, and all dressed in their very best. As for the ladies, it was

the fashion when I was a girl for all to be powdered, but there were many modes of dressing the head. For some wore aigrettes of jewels (who could afford them), some false flowers, and some true flowers, which were pretty and becoming for a young girl: and some had coiffures *à la culbutte*, some *en dorlotte*, some *en papillon*, or *en vergette, en équivoque, en désespoir*, or *en tête de mouton*. The last was the commonest, in which there were curls all over the back of the head. And there were French curls, which looked something like eggs strung on a wire round the head, and Italian curls or scallop-shells. The petticoats were ornamented with falbalas and *pretantailles;* most ladies wore *criardes*, and all had hoops, but some wore hoops *en coupole* and some small hoops, and some looked like a state-bed on castors, and as if they had robbed the valance for the skirt and the tester for the trimmings. But there is no end to the changes of fashion. As for the gentlemen, their vanities were mostly in the wig, for though the full wig was now gone out of fashion, having given place to the neat and elegant tie-wig

with a broad black ribbon and a little bag, or a queue, yet there were not wanting the full-bottom periwig, the large flowing grizzle, and the great wig with three tails. And every kind of face, the vacant, the foolish, the sensual, the envious, the eager, the pert, the dignified, the brave, the anxious, the confident—but none so noble as that face of my lord.

'Is our Queen meditating?'

I started, for he was beside me.

'It is my first ball,' I said, 'and I am wondering at the pretty sight of so many happy and merry people.'

'Their merriment I grant,' he replied. 'As for their happiness, we had better perhaps agree to take that for granted.'

'I suppose we all agree to give ourselves up to the pleasures of the hour,' I said. 'Can we not be happy, even if we have a care which we try to hide?'

'I hope, at least,' he said, 'that Miss Pleydell has no cares.'

I shook my head, thinking how, if all hearts were opened and all secrets known, there would be wailing instead of laughter,

and my lord and myself would start asunder with shame on my part and loathing on his.

'Yes,' he said; 'an assembly of people to please and to be pleased is a charming sight. For a time we live in an atmosphere of ease and contentment, and bask at the feet of the Queen of Hearts.'

'Oh, my lord!' I said, 'do not pay me compliments: I am only used to plain truth.'

'Surely that is the honest truth,' he said. 'To be Queen of the Wells is nothing, but to be the Queen of Hearts is everything.'

'Nay, then,' I returned, blushing, 'I see I must put myself under the protection of Mr. Walsingham.'

The old beau was hovering round, and gave me his hand with a great air of happiness.

'From me,' he said, 'Miss Pleydell knows that she will hear nothing but truth. The language of gallantry with a beautiful woman is pure truth.'

It was eight o'clock, and country dances began. I danced one with Lord Chudleigh and one with some gentleman of Essex,

whose name I forget. But I remember that next day he offered me, by letter, his hand, and eight hundred pounds a year. At nine we had tea and chocolate. Then more country dances, in which my Nancy danced with such enjoyment and happiness as made Sir Robert clap his hands and laugh aloud.

At eleven all was over, mantles, hoods, and capuchins were donned, and we walked home to our lodgings, escorted by the gentlemen. The last face I saw as we entered the house was that of my lord as he bowed farewell.

Cicely was waiting to receive us.

'Oh, madam!' she cried, 'I was looking through the door when my lord took out miss for the minuet. Oh! oh! oh! how beautiful! how grand she did it! Sure never was such a handsome pair.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Esther to me, when Cicely had left us, 'I believe there never was known so great a success for a first appearance. There is no doubt you are the reigning Toast of the season, child. Well, enjoy when you can, and be not spoiled by flattery, Kitty, which is vanity. Such a face, they

all declare, such a figure, such eyes, such a carriage, were never before seen at Epsom. Beware of flatterers, my dear. Where did you get such graces from? Pay no heed to the compliments of the men, child. Sure, it is the prettiest creature ever formed. They would turn thy head, my dear.'

In the middle of the night I awoke from an uneasy dream. I thought that I was dancing with my lord before all the people at the assembly: they applauded loudly, and I heard them whispering: 'What a noble pair! Sure Heaven hath made them for each other!' Then suddenly Peggy Baker burst through the crowd, leading by the hand my uncle, and crying: 'Lord Chudleigh, I congratulate you upon your marriage! Your bride is with you, and here is the Chaplain of the Fleet, who made you happy.' Then the people laughed and hissed: the doctor lifted his great forefinger and shook it at my lord; I saw his face change from love to disgust, and with a cry I hid my shameful cheeks in my hands and fled the place.

The waking was no better than the dreaming. The husband whom I had almost for-

gotten, and whom to remember gave me no more than a passing pang, was here, with me, in the same town. What was I to do—how treat him—in what words to tell him, if I must tell him, the dreadful, the humiliating truth?

Or, again—a thought which pierced my breast like a knife—suppose I were condemned to see him with my own eyes, falling in love, step by step, with another woman: suppose that I were punished by perceiving that my humble and homely charms would not fix, though they might attract for a single night, his wandering eyes: oh! how could I look on in silence, and endure without a word the worst that a woman can suffer? Ah! happy Esther, whom the king loved above all women: so that he set the royal crown upon her head!

The day broke while I was lying tortured by these dreadful suspicions and fears. My window looked towards the east: I rose, opened the casement, and let in the fresh morning air. The downs rose beyond the house with deep heavy woods of elm and birch. There was already the movement and stir of life

which begins with the early dawn: it is as if the wings of the birds are shaking as their pretty owners dream before they wake: as if the insects on the leaves were all together exhorting each other to fly about and enjoy the morning sun, because, haply, life being so uncertain to the insect tribe, and birds so numerous, that hour might be their last: as if the creatures of the underwood, the rabbits, hares, weasels, ferrets, snakes, and the rest were moving in their beds, and rustling the dry leaves on which they lie. Over the tree-tops spread broader and broader the red glow of the morning: the sounds of life grew more distinct: and the great sun sprang up. Then I heard a late-singing thrush break into his sweet song, which means a morning hymn of content. The other birds had mostly done their singing long before July: but near him there sang a turtle with a gentle coo which seemed to say that she had got all she wanted or could look for in life, and was happy. Truly, not the spacious firmament on high alone, but all created things do continually teach man to laud, praise, and glorify the name of the great Creator. 'Whoso,'

says the Psalmist, 'is wise and will observe these things'—but alas for our foolishness! I looked, and drank the sweetness of the air, and felt the warmth of the sun, but I thought of nothing but my husband—mine, and yet not mine, nor could he ever be mine save for such confession and shame as made my heart sick to think of. To be already in love with a man whom one had seen but twice! was it not a shame? Yet such a man! and he was already vowed to me and I to him—although he knew it not: and, although in a secret, shameful way, the holy Church had made us one, so that, as the service hath it, GOD Himself had bound us together. To be in love already! Oh, Kitty! Kitty!

There is a chapter in the Song of Solomon which is, as learned men tell us, written 'of Christ and His Church,' the poet speaking in such an allegory that, to all but the most spiritual-minded, he seemeth to speak of the simple love of a man and a maid. And surely it may be read without sin by either man or maid in love. 'I am,' she says, 'the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys . . . My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise

up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.'

When I had read that chapter and dried my weeping eyes, and perhaps prayed awhile, I lay down upon my bed again, and slept till Cicely came at seven and called me up to dress and walk abroad.

CHAPTER V.

HOW KITTY WORE HER CROWN.

Thus happily began our stay at Epsom Wells.

After our morning walk we returned home, being both fatigued with the excitement and late hours, and one, at least, desirous to sit alone and think about the strange and perilous adventure of the evening. Strange, indeed; since when before did a man dance with his own wife and not recognise her? Perilous, truly, for should that man go away and give no more heed to his wife, then would poor Kitty be lost for ever. For already was her heart engaged in this adventure, and, like a gambler, she had staked her whole upon a single chance. Fortunately for her, the stake was consecrated with tears of

repentance, bitterness of shame, and prayers for forgiveness.

Mrs. Esther gently dozed away the morning over 'Pamela.' I was occupied with needlework. Cicely ran in and out of the room, looking as if she longed to speak, but dared not for fear of waking madam.

After a while she beckoned me to the door, and whispered me that outside was a higgler with ducklings and cherries, should we please to choose them for our dinner. I followed her, and after a bargain, in which the Surrey maiden showed herself as good as if she had been bred in Fleet Market (though without the dreadful language), she began upon the business which she was burning to tell me.

'Sure, Miss Kitty,' she said, 'all the world is talking this morning about the beautiful Miss Pleydell. The book-shop is full of nothing else, the gentlemen in the coffee-house can talk of nothing but of Miss Pleydell, and up and down the Terrace it is nothing but "Oh, madam, did you see the dancing of Miss Pleydell last night?" "Dear madam, did you remark the dress of Miss

Pleydell?" And "Can you tell me whence she comes, this beautiful Miss Pleydell?" And the men are all sighing as if their hearts would burst, poor fellows! And they say that Lord Chudleigh gave a supper after the ball to the gentlemen of his acquaintance, when he toasted the beautiful Miss Pleydell. O the happiness! He is a young nobleman with a great estate, and said to be of a most virtuous and religious disposition. The gentlemen are mounting ribbons in honour of the peerless Kitty, so I hear—and you will not be offended at their venturing so to take your name—and, with a little encouragement, they will all be fighting for a smile from the fair Kitty.'

'Silly girl, to repeat such stories!'

'Nay,' she replied, 'it is all truth, every word. They say that never since the Wells began has there been such a beauty. The oldest dipper, old Mrs. Humphreys, who is past eighty, declares that Miss Pleydell is the loveliest lady that ever came to Epsom. When you go out this afternoon you will be finely beset.'

And so on, all the morning, as her occa-

sion brought her into the room, whisking about, duster in hand, and always clatter, clatter, like the mill-wheel.

After dinner we received a visit from no other than Lord Chudleigh himself.

He offered a thousand apologies for presenting himself without asking permission, kindly adding, that however he might find Miss Kitty, whether dressed or in dishabille, she could not be otherwise than charming. I know one person who thought Kitty in her morning frock, muslin pinner, and brown hair (which was covered with little curls), looped up loosely, or allowed to flow freely to her waist, prettier than Kitty dressed up in hoop, and patches, and powder. It was the mirror which told that person so, and she never dared to tell it to any other.

He had ventured, he said, still speaking to Mrs. Esther, to present an offering of flowers and fruit sent to him that morning from his country house in Kent; and then Cicely brought upstairs the most beautiful basket ever seen, filled with the finest flowers, peaches, plums, apricots, and cherries. I had seen none such since I said farewell to the

old Vicarage garden, where all those things grew better, I believe, than anywhere else in England.

'My lord,' said my aunt, quite confused at such a gift, such condescension! 'What can we say but that we accept the present most gratefully.'

'Indeed, madam,' he replied, 'there is nothing to say. I am truly pleased that my poor house is able to provide a little pleasure to two ladies. It is the first time, I assure you, that I have experienced the joy of possessing my garden.'

Then he went on to congratulate Mrs. Esther on my appearance at the ball.

'I hear,' he said, 'that on the Terrace and in the coffee-house one hears nothing but the praises of the fair Miss Pleydell.'

I blushed, not so much at hearing my name thus mentioned, because I was already (in a single day—fie, Kitty!) accustomed and, so to speak, hardened, but because he smiled as he spoke. My lord's smile was not like some men's, bestowed upon every trifle; but, like his speech, considered. I fear, indeed, that even then, so early in the

day, my heart was already thoroughly possessed of his image.

'The child,' said Mrs. Esther, 'must not have her head turned by flattery. Yet, I own, she looked and moved like one of the three Graces. Yet we who love her must not spoil her. It was her first ball, and she did her best, poor child, to acquit herself with credit.'

'Credit,' said my lord, kindly, 'is a poor, cold word to use for such a grace.'

'We thank your lordship,' Mrs. Esther bowed with dignity. This, surely, was a return to the Pimpernel Manner. 'We have been living in seclusion, for reasons which need not be related, for some time. Therefore, Kitty has never before been to any public assembly. To be sure, I do not approve of bringing forward young girls too early; although, for my own part, I had already at her age been present at several entertainments of the most sumptuous and splendid character, not only at Bagnigge Wells and Cupid's Garden, but also at many great city feasts and banquets for the reception of illustrious personages, particularly in the

year of grace 1718, when my lamented father was Lord Mayor of London.'

The dear lady could never avoid introducing the fact that she was thus honourably connected.

Lord Chudleigh, however, seemed interested. I learned, later, that some had been putting about, among other idle rumours, that I was the daughter of a tattered country curate.

'Indeed,' he said, 'I knew not that the late Mr. Pleydell had been the Lord Mayor. It is a most distinguished position.'

'Not Mr. Pleydell, my lord. Sir Samuel Pimpernel, Knight, my father, was the Lord Mayor in question. His father was Lord Mayor before him. Kitty Pleydell is not my blood relation, but my niece and ward by adoption. Her father was a most distinguished Cambridge scholar and divine.'

'There are Pleydells,' said Lord Chudleigh, 'in Warwickshire. Perhaps——'

'My father,' I said, 'was rector of a country parish in Kent, where Sir Robert Levett hath a large estate. He was the younger son of the Warwickshire family of that name, and

died in the spring of last year. My relations of that county I have never met. Now, my lord, you have my genealogy complete.'

'It is an important thing to know,' he said, laughing; 'in a place like Epsom, where scandal is the staple of talk, as many freedoms are taken with a lady's family as with her reputation. I am glad to be provided with an answer to those who would enact the part of town-crier or backbiter, a character here greatly aspired to. No doubt the agreeable ladies, whose tongues in the next world will surely be converted into two-edged swords, have already furnished Miss Kitty with highwaymen, tallow-chandlers, or attorneys for ancestors, and Wapping, Houndsditch, or the Rules of the Fleet'—it was lucky that Mrs. Esther had a fan—'for their place of residence. In the same way, they have most undoubtedly proved to each other that she has not a feature worth looking at, that her eyes squint—pray pardon me, Miss Kitty—her hair is red, her figure they would have the audacity to call crooked, and her voice they would maliciously say was cracked. It is the joy of these people to detract from

merit. You can afford to be charitable, Miss Kitty. The enumeration of impossible disgraces and the distortion of the rarest charms afford these ladies some consolation for their envy and disappointment.

'I hope, my lord,' I said, 'that it will not afford me a consolation or happiness to believe that my sex is so mean and envious thus to treat a harmless stranger.'

He laughed.

'When Miss Kitty grows older,' he said to Mrs. Esther, 'she will learn to place less confidence in her fellows.'

'Age,' said Mrs. Esther, sadly, 'brings the knowledge of evil. Let none of us wish to grow older. Not that your lordship hath yet gained the right to boast this knowledge.'

Then my lord proceeded to inform us that he purposed presenting some of the ladies of the Wells with an entertainment, such as it seems is expected from gentlemen of his rank.

'But I would not,' he said, 'invite the rest of the company before I had made sure that the Queen of the Wells would honour

me with her presence. I have engaged the music, and if the weather holds fine we will repair to Durdans Park, where we shall find dancing on the grass, with lamps in the trees, supper, and such amusements as ladies love and we can provide.'

This was indeed a delightful prospect; we accepted with great joy, and so, with protestations of service, his lordship departed.

'There is,' said Mrs. Esther, 'about the manners of the Great a charming freedom. Good breeding is to manners what Christianity is to religion. It is, if one may reverently say so, a law of perfect liberty. My dear, I think that we are singularly fortunate in having at the Wells so admirable a young nobleman, as well as our friends (also well-bred gentlefolks) Sir Robert and Lady Levett. I hear that the young Lord Eardesley is also at the Wells, and was at last night's assembly; and no doubt there are other members of the aristocracy by whom we shall be shortly known. You observed, Kitty, the interest shown by his lordship when I delicately alluded to the rank and exalted station of my late father. It is well

for people to know, wherever we are, and especially when we are in the society of nobility, that we are not common folk. What ancestors did his lordship say that envious tongues would give us — tallow-chandlers? attorneys? A lying and censorious place, indeed!'

Later on, we put on our best and sallied forth, dressed for the evening in our hoops, patches and powder, but not so fine as for Monday's ball. The Terrace and New Parade were crowded with people, and very soon we were surrounded by gentlemen anxious to establish a reputation for wit or position by exchanging a few words with the Reigning Beauty of the season, none other, if you please, than Kitty Pleydell.

But to think in how short a time—only a few hours, a single night—that girl was so changed that she accepted, almost without wondering, all the incense of flattery that was offered up to her! Yet she knew, being a girl of some sense, that it was unreal, and could not mean anything; else a woman so bepraised and flattered would lose her head. The very extravagance of gallantry preserves

the sex from that calamity. A woman must be a fool indeed who can really believe that her person is that of a Grace, her smile the smile of Venus, her beauty surpassing that of Helen, and her wit and understanding that of Sappho. She knows better: she knows that her wit is small and petty beside the wit of a man: her wisdom nothing but to learn a little of what men have said: her very beauty, of which so much is said, but a flower of a few years, whereas the beauty of manhood lasts all a life. Therefore, when all is said and done, the incense burned, the mock prayers said, the hymn of flattery sung, and the Idol bedecked with flowers and gems, she loves to step down from the altar, slip away from the worshippers, and run to a place in the meadows, where waits a swain who will say: 'Sweet girl, I love thee—with all thy faults!'

On this day, therefore, began my brief reign as Queen of the Wells. Mr. Walsingham was one of the first to salute me. With courtly grace he bowed low, saying:

'We greet our Queen, and trust her Majesty is in health and spirits.'

Then all the gentlemen round formed a lane, down which we walked, my old courtier marching backwards.

The scene, Mrs. Esther said afterwards, reminded her of a certain day long ago, when they crowned a Queen of Beauty at Bagnigge Wells, in the presence of the Lord Mayor, her father.

To be sure, it was a very pretty sight to watch all these gallants making legs and handling their canes with such grace as each could command, some of them having studied in those noble schools of manners, the *salons* of Paris, or the reception-rooms of great ladies in London. Yet it was certain to me that not one of them could compare with my lord—my own lord, I mean.

Presently we came upon Lady Levett and her party, when, after a few words of kind greeting from her ladyship, and an admonition not to believe more of what I was told than I knew to be true, we divided, Nancy coming with me and Mrs. Esther remaining with Lady Levett. The music was playing and the sun shining, but a fine air blew from the Downs, and we were beneath the shade of

the trees. We sat upon one of the benches, and the gentlemen gathered round us.

'Gentlemen,' said Nancy, 'I am the Queen's maid of honour. You may all of you do your best to amuse her Majesty—and me. We give you permission to exhaust yourselves in making the court happy.'

What were they to do? What had they to offer? There was a bull-baiting in the market at which my maid of honour cried fie! There was a match with quarter-staves on the Downs for the afternoon, but that met with little favour.

'We need not leave home,' said Nancy, 'to see two stout fellows bang each other about the head with sticks. That amusement may be witnessed any summer evening, with grinning through a horse-collar and fighting with gloves on the village green at home. Pray go on to the next amusement on the list. The cock-pit you can leave out.'

One young gentleman proposed that we might play with pantines, a ridiculous fashion of paper doll then in vogue as a toy for ladies with nothing to do: another that we should go hear the ingenious Mr. King lecture on

Astronomy: another that we should raffle for chocolate creams: another that we should do nothing at all, 'for,' said he, 'why do we come to the Wells but for rest and quiet? and if Miss Pleydell and her maid of honour do but grant us the privilege of beholding their charms, what need we of anything but rest?

'"To walk and dine, and walk and sup,
To fill the leisure moments up,
Idly enough but to the few
Who've really nothing else to do.
Yet here the sports exulting reign,
And laughing loves, a num'rous train;
Here Beauty holds her splendid court,
And flatt'ring pleasures here resort."'

I, for one, should have enjoyed the witnessing of a little sport better than the homage of lovers.

'Here is Miss Peggy Baker,' cried Nancy, jumping up. 'Oh! I *must* speak to my dear friend Miss Peggy.'

Miss Baker was walking slowly down the Terrace, accompanied by her little troop of admirers. At sight of us her face clouded for a moment, but she quickly recovered and smiled a languid greeting.

'Dear Miss Peggy,' cried Nancy—I knew she was going to say something mischievous —'you come in the nick of time.'

'Pray command me,' she replied graciously.

'It is a simple question'—Miss Baker looked suspicious. 'Oh! a mere trifle'—Miss Baker looked uneasy. 'It is only—pray, gentlemen, were any of you in the book-shop this morning?'

All protested that they were not—a denial which confirmed my opinion that impertinence was coming.

'Nay,' said Nancy, 'we all know the truthfulness of gallants, which is as notorious as their constancy. Had you been there you would not have paid Miss Pleydell those pretty compliments which are as well deserved as they are sincere. But, Miss Peggy, a scandalous report hath got abroad. They say that you said, this morning, at the book-shop, that Kitty Pleydell's eyes squinted.'

'Oh! oh!' cried Mr. Walsingham, holding up his hands, and all the rest cried 'Oh! oh!' and held up theirs.

'I vow and protest,' cried Peggy Baker,

blushing very much. 'I vow and protest——'

'I said,' interrupted Nancy, 'that it was the cruellest slander. You are all good-nature. Stand up, Kitty dear. Now tell us, Miss Peggy, before all these gentlemen, do those eyes squint?'

'Certainly not,' said poor Peggy, in great confusion.

'Look at them well,' continued Nancy. 'Brown eyes, full and clear—eyes like an antelope. Saw anyone eyes more straight?'

'Never,' said Peggy, fanning herself violently.

'Or more beautiful eyes?'

'Never,' replied Miss Peggy.

'There,' said Nancy, 'I knew it. I said that from the lips of Miss Peggy Baker nothing but kind words can fall. You hear, gentlemen; women *are* sometimes found who can say good things of each other: and if we find the malicious person who dared report that Miss Peggy Baker said such a thing, I hope you will duck her in the horse-pond.'

Miss Peggy bowed to us with her most languishing air, and passed on. Nancy held

up her hands, while the gentlemen looked at one another and laughed.

'Oh, calumny!' she cried. 'To say that Kitty's eyes were askew!'

For there had been a discussion at the book-shop that morning, in which the name of Miss Pleydell was frequently mentioned; and her person, bearing, and face were all particularly dwelt upon. Miss Baker, as usual in their parliaments, spoke oftenest, and with the most animation. She possessed, on such occasions, an insight into the defects of women that was truly remarkable, and a power of representing them to others which, while it was eloquent and persuasive, perhaps erred on the side of exaggeration. She summed up what she had to say in these kind words:

'After all, one could forgive fine clothes worn as if the girl had never had a dress on fit to be seen before, and manners like a hoyden trying to seem a nun, and the way of dancing taught to the cits who go to Sadler's Wells, and a sun-burnt complexion, and hands as big as my fan—all these things are rustic, and might be cured—or endured. But I cannot forgive her squint!'

And now she had to recant publicly, and confess that there was no squint at all.

This audacious trick of Nancy's was, you may be sure, immediately spread abroad, so that for that day at least the unfortunate creature found the people looking after and laughing wherever she went. Naturally, she hated me, who really had done her no harm at all, more and more.

The gentlemen, or one among them, I know not who, offered this evening a general tea-drinking with the music. It was served under the trees upon the open walk, and was very gay and merry. After the tea, when the day began to decline, we went to the rooms where, though there was no dancing, there was talking and laughing in one room, and in the other games of cards of every kind—cribbage, whist, quadrille, hazard, and lansquenet. We wandered round the tables, watching the players intent upon the chances of the cards. I thought of poor Sir Miles Lackington, who might, had it not been for his love of gaming, have been now, as he began, a country gentleman with a fine estate. In this room we found Lord Chudleigh. He

was not playing, but was looking on at a table where sat a young gentleman and an officer in the army. He did not see us, and, under pretence of watching the play of a party of four ladies playing quadrille, one of whom was Lady Levett, I sat down to watch him. Was he a gambler?

I presently discovered that he was not looking at the game, but the players. Presently he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the younger man, and said, in a quiet voice:

'Now, Eardesley, you have had enough. This gentleman knows the game better than you.'

'I hope, my lord,' cried the other player, springing to his feet, 'that your lordship doth not insinuate——'

'I speak what I mean, sir. Lord Eardesley will, if he takes my advice, play no more with you.'

'Your lordship,' cried the gentleman in scarlet, 'will perhaps remember that he is speaking to a gentleman——'

'Who left Bath, a fortnight ago, under such circumstances as makes it the more necessary for me to warn my friend. No,

sir'—his eye grew hard, and his face stern. 'No, sir. Do not bluster or threaten. I will neither play with you, nor suffer my friends to play with you; nor, sir, will I fight with you, unless you happen to attack me upon the road. And, sir, if I see you here to-morrow, the master of the ceremonies will put you to the door by means of his lackeys. Come, Eardesley.'

The gamester, thus roundly accused, began to bluster. His honour was at stake; he had been grossly insulted; he would have the satisfaction of a gentleman; he would let his lordship know that his rank should not protect him. With these noble sentiments, he left the room, and the Wells saw him no more.

Then, seeing me alone, for I had escaped from my court, being weary of compliments and speeches, he came to my chair.

'I saw you, my lord,' I said, 'rescue that young gentleman from the man who, I suppose, would have won his money. Is it prudent to engage in such quarrels?'

'The young gentleman,' he replied, 'is, in a sense, my ward. The man is a notorious

sharper, who hath been lately expelled from Bath, and will now, I think, find it prudent to leave the Wells. I hope, Miss Kitty, that you do not like gaming?'

'Indeed, my lord, I do not know if I should like what I have never tried. 'Tis the first time I have seen card-playing.'

'Then you must have been brought up in a nunnery.'

'Not quite that, but in a village, where, as I have already told you, my father was vicar. I do not know any games of cards.'

'How did you amuse yourself in your village?'

'I read, made puddings, worked samplers, cut out and sewed my dresses, and learned lessons with Nancy Levett.'

'The pretty little girl who is always laughing? She should always remain young—never grow old and grave. What else did you do?'

'We had a choir for the Sunday psalms—many people came every Sunday to hear us sing. That was another occupation. Then I used to ride with the boys, or sometimes we would go fishing, or nutting, or black-

berrying—oh! there was plenty to do, and the days were never too long.'

'A better education than most ladies can show,' he replied, with his quiet air of authority.

'And you, my lord. Do you never play cards?'

'No,' he replied. 'Pray do not question me further on my favourite vices, Miss Kitty. I would not confess all my sins even to so charming and so kind a confessor as yourself.'

'I forgive you, my lord,' I said, 'beforehand. Especially if you promise to abandon them all.'

'There are sins,' he said slowly, 'which sometimes leave behind them consequences which can never be forgotten or undone.'

Alas! I knew what he meant. His sin had left him burdened with a wife—a creature who had been so wicked as to take advantage of his wickedness; a woman whom he feared to hear of and already loathed. Poor wife! poor sinner! poor Kitty!

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE DOCTOR WROTE TO KITTY.

The next morning at dinner, we heard the summons of the postboy's horn, and Cicely presently ran in with a letter in her hand. It was addressed to me, in a large bold hand-writing, and was sealed with red wax. I opened it and found a smaller letter inside it, marked 'Private. For my niece's eye alone.' So that both letters were from my uncle, the doctor.

'Your private letter,' said Mrs. Esther, 'doubtless contains some admonition or advice designed for you alone. Put it in your pocket, child, and read it in your own room. As for the other letter, as it is not marked private, it would be well for you to read it aloud, after dinner, and while we are eating

one of my Lord Chudleigh's delicious peaches.'

To this I willingly complied, because I greatly feared the private letter would contain some instructions concerning the secret which the doctor and I possessed between us. Accordingly, the dinner over, I began the perusal of my uncle's letter.

'"My dear Niece,

'"You will first of all, and before reading any farther, convey my dutiful respects to the lady by whose goodness you have been placed in a position as much above what you could have wished, as her benevolence is above the ordinary experience of mortals."'

'Oh, the excellent man!' cried Mrs. Esther.

'"I have to report that, under Providence, I am well in health, and in all respects doing well; the occupation in which I am now engaged having received a stimulus by the threatening of a new Act for the prevention of (so-called) unlawful marriages. The in-

crease in the number of applicants for marriage hath also (as is natural) caused an increase in the upstarts and pretenders who claim to have received canonical orders, being most of them as ignorant as a butcher's block, and no more ordained than the fellows who bang a cushion in a conventicle. The clergymen of London complain that the parsons of the Fleet take away their parishioners, and deprive them of their fees: they cannot say that I, who never take less than a guinea, undersell them. You will be glad to learn that Sir Miles Lackington hath left this place. He hath lately received a legacy from a cousin of a small estate, and hath made an arrangement with his creditors, by virtue of which his detainers are now removed. Nevertheless, we expect him back before long, being well assured that the same temptation and vice of gambling, which brought him here before, will again beset him. Yet he promiseth brave things. We gave him a farewell evening, in the which his health was toasted, and more punch drunk than was good for the heads of some present, among whom were gentlemen mem-

bers of the Utter Bar, from the two Temples and Lincoln's Inn, with many others, an honourable company.

'"It will also be a pleasure to you to learn that the ingenious Mr. Stallabras is also at large. Probably he, too, will return to us ere long. For the present his sole detaining creditor, who had supplied him for years with such articles of apparel (at second-hand) as were necessary for his decent appearance on the credit of his future glory, agreed to take ten guineas in full discharge of a bill for forty, which the poet could never hope to pay, nor the tradesmen to receive. The calling of poet is at best but a poor one, nor should I counsel anyone to practise the writing of verse unless he be a man of fortune, like Mr. Alexander Pope (unfortunately a Papist), or a Fellow of some substantial college, such as the Houses of Trinity, Peter, and Christ, at Cambridge, like Mr. Ray. Nor is there any greater unhappiness than to draw a bill, to speak after the manner of merchants, upon your future success and industry, and to be compelled to discount it. He hath now conceived the idea of a tragedy and of an epic

poem. The first he will endeavour to produce at Drury Lane as soon as it is written: the second he will immediately get subscribed among his friends and patrons. Unfortunately he has already obtained subscriptions for a volume of verses, and, having eaten the subscriptions, cannot now find a publisher: in truth, I believe the verses are not yet written. This melancholy accident obliges him to seek for new patrons. I wish him well.

'"It is, my dear niece, with the greatest satisfaction that I learn you have, with Mrs. Esther, gone to Epsom. The situation of the place, the purity of the air upon the Downs, the salubrity of the waters, the gaiety of the company, will, I hope, all be conducive to the health of that most excellent lady, your best friend——"'

'Oh, the good man!' cried Mrs. Esther.

'"To whom I charge you be dutiful, obedient, and careful in the smallest punctilio. The cheerfulness of the amusements (if Epsom be the same as when I once visited it, when tutor to a young gentleman

of quality) should communicate to her spirits something of the joy with which I could now wish her to regard the world. As for yourself, my child, I am under no apprehension but that music, gay companions, and your time of life will together make you as mirthful as is possible for human being. Remember, however, that happiness is but for a season: that mirth must never pass beyond the bound of good manners: and that when a woman is no longer young, the reputation she has earned as a girl remains with her, even to the grave. Wherefore, Kitty, be circumspect. The town news is but little: the (so-styled) young Pretender is said to be moving again, but little importance is now attached to his doings, and for the moment the Protestant dynasty seems firm. But Heaven knows——"' Here followed a quantity of news about the ministers, the Houses of Parliament, the foreign news, and so forth, which I omit.

'"I have seen a sermon, published this year by one Laurence Sterne, on 'Conscience,' which I would commend to Mrs. Pimpernel. I also commend to you Dr. Samuel Johnson's

'Vanity of Human Wishes,' and the first number of the 'Rambler,' of which I hear great things. Mr. Henry Fielding hath produced a novel called 'Tom Jones,' of which the town is talking. I mention it here in order that you may be cautioned against a book whose sole merit is the faithful delineation of scenes and characters shocking to the female moralist. For the same reason I would have thee beware of Mr. Smollett's 'Peregrine Pickle,' in which, as a man who knows—alas!—the wickedness of the world, I find a great deal to commend.

'"The weather has been strangely hot even for July, and fever is rife in this neighbourhood. I hear that the Bishop of London threatens me with pains and penalties. I have sent word to his lordship, that if he will not allow me to marry, I will *bury*, and that at such prices as will leave his clergy nothing but the fees of the paupers, beggars, and malefactors.

'"I think that I have no more news to send. I would that I were able to send thee such tidings as might be looked for in a London letter; but I know not what actor is carry-

ing away all hearts, nor what lady is the reigning toast, nor what is the latest fashion in cardinal, sack, patch, or tie-wig, nor anything at all that is dear to the hearts of an assembly on the Terrace of Epsom. Therefore, with my duty to Mrs. Pimpernel,

'"I remain, my dear niece,

'"Your loving uncle,

'"GREGORY SHOVEL.

'"Doctor of Divinity."'

'"*Post scriptum.*—I enclose herewith a short letter of admonition, which thou mayest read by thyself, as such things are not interesting to Mistress Pimpernel."'

'Now,' cried Mrs. Esther, 'was there ever such a man? Living in such a place, he preserves his virtue: among such dregs and off-scourings of mankind he stands still erect, proclaiming and preaching Christian virtue. Oh, Kitty! why was not that man made a bishop? Sure, there is no other position in the world fit for him. With what eloquence would he defend Christian faith? With what righteous indignation would he not expel evil-doers?'

I did not dare to ask, which of course

occurred to me, what indignation he would show against such as violated the law by marrying in the Fleet.

'Now,' I said, 'with your permission, madam, I will retire, in order to read my uncle's private letter of admonition.'

I opened the short note in fear; yet there was nothing alarming in it.

'My dear Niece,

'I add a word to say that Lord Chudleigh is going to visit Epsom, and hath either engaged or been offered the mansion of Durdans for the summer: perhaps he is already there. It may be that you will make his acquaintance: in any case you cannot fail of being interested in his doings. Since his visit to the Fleet, I hear that he has been afflicted with a continual melancholy, of which you and I know the cause. He has also led a very regular and almost monastic life, reproaching himself continually for that lapse from temperance which led to what he regards as the curse of his life.

'Child, if he pays you attentions, receive

them with such coquettish allurements as your sex knows how to hang out. On this point I cannot advise. But if he is attracted by more showy and more beautiful women'—I looked at the glass and smiled—'then be careful not to exhibit any jealousy or anger. Remember that jealousy and anger have ruined many a *fœmina furens*, or raging woman. Let things go on, as if nothing of all that you and I wot of had happened. He will be watched, and at the right time will be called upon to acknowledge his wife. Such a return for the evil done me by his father shall be mine. And with such a return of good for evil, a brilliant position for yourself. If he should fall in love, if he hath not already done so, with another woman, you would, in one moment, blast his hopes, trample on all that he held dear, and make him ridiculous, a criminal, and a deceiver. But it is at all times a more Christian thing for a man to fall in love with his own wife.

'Remember, my dear Kitty, I place the utmost reliance on thy good sense. Above all, no woman's jealousies, rages, and fits of

madness. These things will only do thee harm.

'Your loving uncle,
'Gregory Shovel,
'Doctor of Divinity.'

Were one a stock or a stone; had one no feelings; were one destitute of pity, sympathy and compassion, these letters might have been useful as guides to conduct. But the thing had happened to me which my uncle, in his worldly wisdom, could never calculate upon: I had fallen in love with Lord Chudleigh: I was passionately anxious that he should fall in love with me. What room, in such a condition of mind as was this man, for advice so cold, so interested, as this? Return good for evil? What had I to do with that? I wanted to wreak no vengeance on my lord: I would have surrounded him with love, and been willing to become his servant, his slave, anything, if only he would forgive me, take me for his sweetheart, and make me his wife. But to lay those snares: to look on coldly while he made love to other women: to wait my time,

so as to bring shame and remorse upon that noble heart — that, Kitty, was impossible. Yet I could not write to my uncle things which he could not understand. I could not say that I repented and was very sorry: that I loved my lord, and was determined to inflict no harm upon him: and that, if he chose to fall in love with another woman—who was I, indeed, that he should love me?—I was firmly resolved that no act or word of mine should injure him, even though I had to stand in the church and see him with my own eyes married to that other—that happy woman—before the altar.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW KITTY BROKE HER PROMISE.

No one must think that I was sorry, or even embarrassed, when I heard that Harry Temple had joined the company at Epsom; and though the name of coquette was given me by him, and that of jilt, with such other abusive terms as the English tongue provides, by Will Levett, later on, I beg that everyone will believe me when I declare that I had no knowledge at all of being betrothed, or under any kind of promise, to either of these two young men. Yet, as will have been perceived by any who have read the second chapter of this narrative, both of them had just grounds for believing me to be their promised wife. In fact, I was at the time so silly and ignorant that I did not under-

stand what they meant; nor had I, being so much tossed about, and seeing so many changes, ever thought upon their words at all, since. And whereas there was no day in which the thought of my dear and fond Nancy did not come into my mind, there never was a day at all in which my memory dwelt upon either Will or Harry, save as companions of Nancy. And although grievous things followed upon this neglect of mine, I cannot possibly charge myself with any blame in the matter. As for Will, indeed, his conduct was such as to relieve me of any necessity for repentance; while Harry, even if he did play the fool for a while, speedily recovered his senses, and found consolation in the arms of another. Lastly, men ought not to go frantic for any woman: they should reflect that there are good wives in plenty to be had for the asking; women virtuously reared, who account it an honour (as they should) to receive the offer of an honest man's faithful service; that no woman is so good as to have no equal among her contemporaries: while as for beauty, that is mostly matter of opinion. I am sure I cannot under-

stand why they made me Queen of the Wells, when Nancy Levett was passed over; and I have since seen many a plain girl honoured as a beauty, while the most lovely faces were neglected.

The first, then, of my two lovers—or promised husbands—who arrived at Epsom was Harry Temple.

We were walking on the New Parade in the afternoon, making a grand display; I in my new purple velvet with purple ribbons, a purple mantle and purple trimmings to my hat, very grand indeed. Mr. Walsingham was talking like a lover in a novel—I mean of the old-fashioned and romantic school of novel, now gone out. The art of saying fine things, now too much neglected by the young, was then studied by old and young.

'Ladies,' he was saying, 'should never be seen save in the splendour of full dress: they should not eat in public, unless it be chocolates and Turkish sweets: nor drink, unless it be a dish of tea: they should not laugh, lest they derange the position of the patch or the nice adjustment of the coiffure: they may smile, however, upon their lovers: all their

movements should be trim and evenly balanced, according to rules of grace: in fact, just as a woman was the last and most finished work in Nature, so a lady dressed, taught, and cultivated, should be the last and most finished work in Art. The power of beauty—Miss Pleydell will approve this—should be assisted by the insinuation of polite address: rank should be enhanced by the assumption of a becoming dignity: dishabille should hide at home: nor should she show herself abroad until she has heightened and set off her charms, by silk and satin, ribbons and lace, paint, powder, and patches.'

'I suppose, sir,' said Nelly, pointing to an absurd creature whose follies were the diversion of the whole company, 'the dress of the lady over there in the short sack would please you. Her body a state-bed running upon castors, and her head-dress made up of trimmings taken from the tester. She is, sir, I take it, a finished work of Art.'

Then she screamed: 'Oh, Kitty! here is Harry Temple.' And then she blushed, so that Mr. Walsingham looked at both of us with a meaning smile. He came sauntering

along the walk, looking about him carelessly, for as yet he knew none of the company. His manner was improved since last I saw him, a year and more ago: that was doubtless due to a visit to the Continent. He was a handsome fellow certainly, though not so tall or so handsome as Lord Chudleigh: his features were smaller and his air less distinguished; but still a pretty fellow. I thought of Nancy's secret and laughed to myself, as yet never suspecting what he would say. The great difference at first sight between Harry Temple and Lord Chudleigh was that the former looked as if he was ready to take the place which the world would assign to him, while the latter would step to the front and stand there as in his proper place. It is a grand thing to be a leader of men.

Suddenly he saw us, and stood still with such a look of bewilderment and astonishment as I never saw.

'Nancy!'—he had his eyes upon me all the time—'I knew you were here, but—but——'

Here Nancy burst out laughing.

'Harry does not remember you, Kitty. O the inconstancy of men!'

'Kitty?' It was his turn to look confused now. 'Is it possible? Kitty Pleydell? Yet, surely——'

'I am sorry that Mr. Temple so easily forgets his old friends,' I said.

'No, no. Forget? not at all.' He was so disconcerted that he spoke in single words. 'But such a change!'

'A year ago,' I said, 'I was in russet and brown holland, with a straw hat. But this watering-place is not my native village, and I wear brown holland frocks no longer.'

'Save in a pastoral,' said Mr. Walsingham. 'A shepherdess should always wear brown holland, with ribbons and patches, powder and paint; and a crook beautifully wreathed with green ribbons.'

'Gentlemen,' I said to my followers, 'this is my old friend, Mr. Harry Temple, of Wootton Hampstead, Kent, whom you will, I doubt not, welcome among you. But what punishment shall be inflicted upon him for forgetting a lady's face?'

This gave rise to a dispute on an abstract point of gallantry. One held that under no

circumstances, and during no time of absence, however prolonged, should a gentleman forget the face of his mistress; another, that if the lady changed, say from a child to a woman, the forgetfulness of her face must not be charged as a crime. We argued the point with great solemnity. Nancy gave it as her opinion that the rest of a woman's face might be forgotten, but not the eyes, because they never change. Mr. Walsingham combated this opinion. He said that the eyes of ladies change when they marry.

'What change?' I asked.

'The eyes of a woman who is fancy free,' he said gravely, 'are like stars: when she marries, they are planets.'

'Nay,' said Nancy; 'a woman does not wait to be married before her eyes undergo that change. As soon as she falls in love they become planets. For whereas, before that time, they go twinkle, twinkle, upon every pretty fellow who has the good taste to fall in love with her, as mine do when I look upon Lord Eardesley'—the young fellow blushed—'so, after she is in love, they burn with a steady light upon the face of the man

she loves, as mine do when I turn them upon Mr. Walsingham.'

She gazed with so exaggerated an ardour into the old beau's wrinkled and crows'-footed face, that the rest of us laughed. He, for his part, made a profound salute, and declared that the happiness of his life was now achieved, and that he had nothing left to live for.

In the evening, a private ball was given in the Assembly Rooms by some of the gentlemen, Lord Chudleigh among the number, to a circle of the most distinguished ladies at the Wells. In right of my position as Queen, I opened the ball (of course with his lordship). Afterwards, I danced with Harry. When the country dances began, I danced again with Harry, who kept looking in my eyes and squeezing my hand in a ridiculous fashion. At first I set it down to rejoicing and fraternal affection. But he quickly undeceived me when the dance was over, for while we stood aside to let others have their turn, he began about the promise which we know of.

'Little did I think, sweet Kitty,' he said,

with half-shut eyes, 'that when I made that promise to bring you back into Kent, you would grow into so wonderful a beauty.'

'Well, Harry,' I replied, 'it was kindly meant of you, and I thank you for your promise—which I now return you.'

'You return me my promise?' he asked, as if surprised, whereas he ought most certainly to have considered what had been my country ignorance and my maidenly innocence when he gave me his promise.

'Certainly,' I said; 'seeing that I am now under the protection of Mrs. Esther Pimpernel, and have no longer any need for your services.'

'My services?' as if still more surprised. I am convinced that he was only acting astonishment, because he must have known the truth had he reflected at all. 'Why, Kitty, I do not understand. You are not, surely, going to throw me over?'

Then I understood at last.

'Harry,' I said, 'there has been, I fear, some mistake.'

'No,' he replied; 'no mistake—no mistake at all. How could there be a mistake?

You promised that you would return with me, never to go away again.'

'Why, so I did. But, Harry, I never thought——'

'You *must* have known what I meant, Kitty! Do not pretend that you did not. Oh! you may open your eyes as wide as you like, but I shall believe it, nevertheless.'

'You have made a great mistake,' I said; 'that is very certain. Now let us have no more talk of such things, Harry.'

Lord Chudleigh came at that moment to lead me in to supper. I thought very little of what had passed, being only a little vexed that Harry had made so great a blunder.

The supper was pleasant too, with plenty of wax candles, cold chickens, capons, wheat-ears, ice-creams, and champagne, which is certainly the most delicious wine ever made.

After supper, my lord asked me if there was any friend of mine whom I would especially like to be invited to his party at Durdans?

I named Harry Temple, whom my lord immediately sought out, and invited in my name. Harry bowed sulkily, but accepted.

'Is there any person,' Lord Chudleigh asked next, 'whom you would like *not* to be asked?'

'No,' I said; 'I have no enemies.'

'As if the Queen of the Wells could avoid having enemies?' he laughed. 'But there are none who can do you harm, even by the venom of spiteful tongues.'

He was silent for a minute or two, and then he went on, with hesitation:

'Pardon me, Miss Pleydell: I have no right to speak of these things to you; my interest is greater than my politeness, and I venture to ask you a question.'

'Pray speak, my lord.'

'A spiteful tongue has whispered it abroad that you have to-day given your plighted lover a cold reception.'

'Who is my plighted lover?'

'Mr. Harry Temple. Tell me, Miss Pleydell, if there is any promise between you and this gentleman?'

He looked at me in such a way as made me both rejoice and tremble.

'No, my lord,' I said, blushing against my will, and to my great confusion; 'I am not

promised to Mr. Temple. Will your lordship take me to the dancing-room?'

It was a bright moonlit night when we came away. We walked home, escorted by some of the gentlemen. Lord Chudleigh, as he stooped to take my hand, raised it rapidly to his lips and pressed my fingers. The action was not seen, I think, by the others.

That night I tried to put the case plainly to myself.

I said: 'Kitty, my dear, the man you want above all other men to fall in love with you has done it; at least, it seems so. He seeks you perpetually; he talks to you; he singles you out from the rest; he is jealous; his eyes follow you about; he sends fruit and flowers to you; he gives an entertainment, and calls you the Queen of the Feast; he presses your hand and kisses your fingers. What more, Kitty, would you have?'

On the other hand, I thought: 'If he falls in love with you, being already married, as he believes, to another woman, he commits a sin against his marriage vows. Yet what sin can there be in breaking vows pronounced in such a state as he was in, and in such a way?

Why, they seem to me no vows at all, in spite of the validity of the doctor's orders and the so-called blessing of the Church. Yet he cannot part from his wife by simply wishing; and, knowing that, he does actually commit the sin of deceit in loving another woman.

'Kitty, what would you have? For, if he doth not love you, then are you miserable above all women; and if he does, then are you grieved, for his own sake, for it is a sin —and ashamed for your own, because your confession will be a bitter thing to say. Yet must it be made, soon or late. Oh! with what face will you say to him: "My lord, I am that wife of the Fleet wedding"? Or, "My lord, you need not woo me, for I was won before I was wooed"? Or perhaps, worst thing of all, "My lord, the girl who caught your fickle fancy for a moment at Epsom, whom you passed over, after a day or two, for another who was not pretty enough to fix your affections, is your lawful wife"?

'Kitty, I fear that the case is hopeless indeed. For, should he really love you, what forelook or expectancy is there but that the

love will turn to hatred when he finds that he has been deceived ?'

Then I could not but remember how a great lord, with a long rent-roll, of illustrious descent, might think it pleasant for a day or two to dance attendance upon a pretty girl, by way of sport, meaning nothing further, but that he could not think seriously of so humble a girl as myself in marriage. It would matter little to him that she was descended from a long line of gentlemen, although but a vicar's daughter : the Pleydells were only simple country gentlefolk. I was a simple country clergyman's daughter, whose proper place would be in his mother's stillroom : a daughter of one of those men whose very vocation, for the most part, awakens a smile of pity or contempt, according as they are the sycophants of the squire whose living they enjoy, or the drudges of their master the rector whose work they do. It was not in reason to think that Lord Chudleigh— Would to Heaven he had not come to Epsom Wells at all ! Then, when the doctor chose the day for revealing the truth,

I might have borne the hatred and scorn which now, I thought, would kill me.

'Oh, if one could fix him! By what arts do girls draw to themselves the love of men, and then keep that love for ever, so that they never seek to wander elsewhere, and the world is for them like the Garden of Eden, with but one man and one woman in it? I would have all his heart, and that so firmly and irrevocably given to me, that forgiveness should follow confession, and the heart remain still in my keeping when he knew all my wickedness and shame.

Then a sudden thought struck me.

Long ago, when I was a child, I had learned, or taught myself, a thing which I could fain believe was not altogether superstitious. One day my father, who would still be talking of ancient things, and cared for little of more modern date than the Gospels, told me of a practice among the ancients by which they thought to look into the future. It was an evil practice, he said, because if these oracles were favourable, they advanced with blind confidence; and, if unfavourable, with a heart already prepared for certain

defeat and death. Their method was nothing in the world but the opening of a Virgil anywhere, and accepting the first line which offered itself as a prophecy of the event of their undertaking. I was but a little thing when he told me this, but I pondered it in my mind, and I reasoned in this way (nothing doubting that the ancients did really in this manner read the future) :

'If these pagans could tell the event by consulting the words of Virgil, a heathen like unto themselves, how much more readily ought we to learn what is going to happen by consulting the actual Word of God ?'

Thereupon, without telling anyone, I used to consult this oracle, probably by myself, in every little childish thing which interested me.

It was a thing presumptuous, though in my childhood I did not know that it was a sin. Yet I did it on this very night—a grown-up woman—trying to get a help to soothe my mind.

The moonlight was so bright that I could read at the open window without a candle. I had long since extinguished mine.

I opened the Bible at random, kept my finger on a verse, and took the book to the casement.

There I read:

'Wait on the Lord: be of good courage: and He shall strengthen thy heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord.'

Now these words I thankfully accepted as a solemn message from Heaven, an answer to my prayer.

So I laid me down, and presently fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW KITTY HAD LETTERS AND VERSES.

Everybody knows that a watering-place in summer is a nest of singing birds. I do not mean the birds of the air, nor the ladies who sing at the concerts, nor the virtuosos, male and female, who gather together to talk of appogiatura, sonata, and—and the rest of the musical jargon. I mean rather those epigrammatists, libellous imitators of Pasquin, and love-verse writers who abound at such places. Mostly they are anonymous, so that one cannot thank them as one would. The verses, this year at Epsom, came down upon us in showers. They were stuck up on the pillars of the porch of the Assembly Rooms, they were laid upon the table of the book-shop, they were handed about on the

Terrace. Also they came to me at my lodgings, and to Nancy at hers, and very likely to Peggy Baker at hers. Here, for instance, is one set which were shown round at the Assembly:

'Epsom could boast no reigning Toast:
The Terrace wept for pity.
Kind Fortune said, "Come, lift your head:
I send you stately Kitty."

'She came, she reigned, but still disdained
The crowd's applause and fancy;
Quoth Fortune, "Then, content ye, men,
With pretty, witty Nancy."'

Every morning lovers were at our feet (on paper). They wrote letters enjoining me 'by those soft killing eyes' (which rhymed with 'sighs') to take pity on their misery, or to let them die. You would have thought, to read their vows, that all the men in the town were in profound wretchedness. They could not sleep: they could no longer go abroad: they were wasting and pining away: they were the victims of a passion which was rapidly devouring them: Death, they said, would be welcomed as a Deliverer. Yet it will hardly be believed that, in spite of so dreadful an epidemic of low fever, no outward

signs of it were visible in the town at all: the gentlemen were certainly fat and in good case: their hearts seemed merry within them: they laughed, made jokes, sang, and were jolly to outward show: their appetites were good: they were making (apparently) no preparations for demise. Their letters and verses were, however, anonymous, so that it was impossible to point with accuracy to any sufferer who thus dissembled. From information conveyed to me by Cicely Crump, I believe that the verses and letters came in great measure from the apprentices and shopmen employed by the mercers, haberdashers, hosiers, and drapers of the town—young men whose employment brings them constantly into the presence of ladies, but whose humble positions in the world forbid them to do anything more than worship at a great distance: yet their hearts are as inflammable as their betters, and their aspirations are sometimes above their rank, as witness the gallant elopement of Joshua Crump, Cicely's father, with Miss Jenny Medlicott, daughter of an alderman: then they find relief and assume a temporary dignity—as

they fondly think — in writing anonymous love-letters. I think the letters must have come from these foolish and conceited young men, because I cannot understand how a gentleman who values his self-respect could so far humiliate himself as to write letters which he would be ashamed to sign, declaring himself the foolish victim of a foolish passion, and addressing a fellow-creature, a being like himself, with all the imperfections of humanity upon her, as an angel (which is blasphemous), and a sun of glory (which is nonsense), or a bright particular star (which is copied from the preface to the Bible). I confess that we liked the open compliments and public attentions of the gentlemen: they pleased us, and we took them in sober honesty for what they were worth—the base coin of gallantry rings as pleasantly sometimes as the guinea gold of love—but it is one thing to be called a goddess in the accepted language of exaggeration and mock humility commonly used in polite assemblies, and another to be addressed in a grovelling strain, seriously and humbly, as if one were the Lama of Thibet, or the great Bashaw, or

the Pope himself. It is pleasant to see a young fellow dancing along the walk with his hat under his arm, making reverence, with his eyes full of admiration, his face lit with smiles, and compliments upon his tongue, because one knows that it is the natural homage paid by an honest fellow to a pretty girl, and that when years have robbed the beauty, the homage will be paid to some one else. But for these silly boys' letters——

And then we made the sad discovery, by comparing our letters, that they were not even original. Many of them were, word for word, the same, showing that they had been copied from the same model. If it be true that passion makes the most tongue-tied lover eloquent, then this discovery proved that the violence of the passion was as feigned as the letters were false, unless Nancy's supposition was true.

'Fie!' cried she, 'the wretch has written the same letters to both of us. Can he be in love with two maids at the same time?'

Then she took both letters and showed them about among the company.

There was another kind of letter which

I received: it was filled with slander and abuse, and was written in disguised handwriting. Several of them came to me, and I was foolish enough to be vexed over them, even to shed tears of vexation. My anonymous correspondent gave me, in fact, such information and advice as the following, which was not conveyed to me all at once, but in several letters.

'Your Lord Chudleigh is very well known to be a gambler who hath already dipped more than half his estate; do you think it possible that he should marry the daughter of that poor thing—a country parson—with no more fortune to her back than what a city madam may chance to give her? Be not deceived. Your triumph is to walk the Terrace with him at your elbow: your disgrace will be when he leaves you to lament alone. . . .'

'Do not think that any other gentleman will stoop to pick up the cast-off fancy of Lord Chudleigh. When he leaves you, expect nothing but general desertion and contempt. This advice comes from a well-wisher.'

'Lord Chudleigh is, as is very well known, the falsest and the most fickle of men. When he hath added you to the list of women whom he hath deceived, he will go away to Bath or town, there to boast of what he hath done. He belongs to the Seven Devils' Club, whose boast it is to spare no man in play and no woman in love. Be warned in time.'

'Poor Kitty Pleydell! Your reputation is now, indeed, cracked, if not broken altogether. Better retire to the obscurity of your town lodging, where, with Mrs. Pimpernel, you may weep over the chances that you think to have lost, but have never really possessed. Better take up, while is yet time, with Harry Temple. All the Wells is talking of your infatuation about Lord Chudleigh. He, for his part, is amused. With his friends he laughs and makes sport.'

And so on, and so on: words which, like the buzzing of a fly or the sting of a gnat, annoy for a while and are then forgotten. For the moment one is angry: then one remembers things and words which show how false are these charges: one reflects

that the writer is more to be pitied than the receiver: and one forgives. Perhaps I was the readier to forgive because I saw a letter written by no other (from the similarity of the *t's* and *k's*) than Miss Peggy Baker, and was fully persuaded that the writer of these unsigned letters was that angry nymph herself.

As for the verses which were left at the door, and brought by boys who delivered them and ran away—Nancy said they had no clothes on except a quiver and a pair of wings, and so ran away for shame lest Cicely should see them—they bore a marvellous resemblance to those which the ingenious Mr. Stallabras was wont to manufacture; they spoke of nymphs and doves and bosky groves; of kids and swains on verdant plains, of shepherds' reeds and flowery meads, of rustic flutes and rural fruits.

'The fashion of verses,' said Mrs. Esther, 'seems little changed since we were here in 1720. Doubtless the English language has never been able to achieve a greater excellence than that arrived at by Dryden, Pope, Addison, and Steele.'

Perhaps the language of love is always the same, and when a man feels that tender emotion he naturally desires to quit the garish town and the artificial restraints of society, and with his *inamorata* to seek the simple delights of the meadows and the fields, there to be together:

> 'Come, live with me and be my love,
> And we will all the pleasures prove——'

So that to every lover the old language, with its musty tropes and rusty figures, is new and fresh, just as any other delight in life when first tasted. I say nothing for that poor weakling, that hot-house plant, the passion affected by beaux at a watering-place for fashionable beauties, which may use the strong language of real love and yet is so fragile as to be in danger of perishing with every cold blast and frosty air.

I would not laugh at these simple poets, because I have learned since then that there are youths who, too bashful to speak, may yet conceive such a pure and noble passion for a woman—who certainly does not deserve it—as may serve for them as a stimulus and

goad to great actions. For no creature, whether man or woman, can do fit suit and service to another, whether in thought or action, without endeavouring to make himself fit and worthy to be her servant. And if he be but one of a hundred following in a crowd of worshippers, it is good for him to mark and obey the laws of gallantry and knightly service, and to lay aside for a while the talk of barrack, stable, coffee-house, and gaming-room.

'Pretty moralist,' said Nancy, 'you would like the young fellows at your heel, doing suit and service; and you would like to feel that their attendance is doing good to their innocent souls. Now, for my part, I think only how they may be doing good to myself, and when I see them figuring and capering, hat under arm, one foot valiantly stuck out—so—the ties of their wigs wagging behind them, and their canes bobbing at their wrists. I feel, my dear, as if I was not born in vain. All this posturing, all this capering, like a French dancing-master or a bear with a hurdy-gurdy, is meant for me—that is, except what is meant for you, which is the larger

half. It may do good to the men: I am sure I wish from my heart it does, because the poor profligates want so much good done to them; but I rather love to think of the honour it confers upon us women, and the envy, hatred, and malice it awakens in the breast of our sisters. My dear Peggy Baker is turning positively green with this hateful passion of jealousy. To be a Toast, even a second Toast, like me, when your superior charms—I am not a bit jealous, Kitty, my dear—have had their due acknowledgment, is a very great honour. In years to come, say about the beginning of the nineteenth century, if I live so long, I shall say to my grandchildren, who will then be about eighteen or nineteen, and as beautiful as the day, "My dears," I shall say, "your grandmother, though you will find it difficult to believe, was not always toothless, nor did her hands always shake, nor were her cheeks wrinkled, nor were her chin and nose close together. Look in the glass, girls, and you may guess what your poor old grandmother once was, in the days when she was pretty Nancy Levett, a Toast when the beautiful

Kitty Pleydell was Queen of the Wells. Kitty Pleydell, who married——," no, my dear, I will not say it, because it might bring you bad luck.'

I told Nancy about Harry Temple's strange mistake ; she grew very serious over it, and reflected what was best to be done. I warned her to say nothing herself, but to leave him to his own reflections. First he sulked, that is to say, he avoided me in public, and did not even pay his respects to Mrs. Pimpernel in private ; then he implored me to give him another hearing. I gave him what he asked, I heard him tell his story over again, then I assured him once more that it was impossible. He behaved very strangely, refused to take my answer as final, and vexed us by betraying in public the discontent and anger which, had he possessed any real regard for me, he ought to have kept a secret in his own breast. Some of the backbiters, as Lord Chudleigh told me, put it about that I had thrown over my former lover. Allusion to this calumny was made, as has already been shown, in the anonymous letters.

Lord Chudleigh paid me no compliments and wrote me no verses, nor did he often join in our train upon the Terrace. But he distinguished us by frequently paying a visit to our lodgings in the morning, when he would sit and read, or talk, and sometimes share our simple dinner.

'We who belong to the great City houses,' said Mrs. Esther after one of these visits, 'are accustomed from infancy to familiarity with Nobility. My father, when Worshipful Master of the Scourers' Company, or in his year of office as Lord Mayor, would sometimes have a peer on one side and a bishop on the other. Baronets and simple knights we hardly valued. Therefore these visits of his lordship, which are no doubt a great distinction for both of us, seem like a return of my childhood.'

We learned from Lord Chudleigh that it was his intention (afterwards fully carried out) to take that active part in the administration of state affairs to which his exalted rank naturally called him.

'I am ever of opinion,' he said, 'that a gentleman in this country owes it to his

birth and position to do his utmost for the preservation of our liberties and the maintenance of sound government.'

And he once told us, to our astonishment, that had he lived in the days of Charles the First, he should have joined the party of the Parliament.

It seemed to me, who watched him narrowly and with trembling, that he was desirous, in these visits, to find out what manner of person I was, and whether I possessed any virtues to illustrate that external comeliness which had already taken his fancy. Alas! I thought continually with shame of the time when I should have to throw myself at his feet and implore his mercy and forgiveness.

Then he encouraged me to talk about my childhood and my father, taking pleasure, I thought, in the contemplation of a life given up to heaven and learning, and smiling at the picture of Lady Levett, who ruled us all, the two boys who came home to tease the girls, and little Nancy, so fond and so pretty. I wondered then that he should care to hear about the way I lived, the books I read, the

death of my honoured father, and the little things which make up a country maid's life, wherein the ripples and the gentle breezes are as important to her as great storms and gales to men and women of the world. I know, now, that when a man loves a girl there is nothing concerned with her that he does not want to know, so that her image may be present to him from the beginning, and that he may feel that there has been no year of her life, no action of hers at all, that he does not know, with what she thought, what she did, who were her friends, and what she was like.

Thus he told me about his own country house, which was a very fine place indeed, and his gardens, stables, library, pictures, and all the splendid things which he had inherited.

Two things we hid from each other, the one that I was the girl whom he had married: the other, that he was already married.

'Child,' said Nancy, 'the young lord hath plainly bewitched thee. Remember, my dear, that a woman must not be won too easily. Can we not break his heart a little?'

Lady Levett took occasion to speak to me to the same effect.

'Kitty,' she said, 'I have eyes in my head and can see. Do not encourage the man too much. Yet it would be a grand match, and I should be well content to see a coronet on that pretty head. Still, be not too ready. But he is a handsome fellow, and I believe as good as we can expect of any man in this profligate age. Nay, child, do not change colour: I know nothing against his character, except that he has a town house and that he has lived much in London. But make him feel a little the pangs of love. Listen, or pretend to listen, to the addresses of another man. When my husband came courting me, do you think I said yes all at once? Not so. There were other suitors in the field, let me tell thee, Kitty, as young and as rich as Sir Robert, and of as good a family. To be sure, there was none so good in my eyes. As for one, he rode to hounds all day, and in the evening slept in his chair. He broke his neck jumping a brook when he was but thirty. Another, he drank October all day long, and at night was carried to bed like a

log. When he was forty he was taken with a seizure, being still a bachelor, all for love of me and his brown jug, which I think he loved still more. And a third, he was choleric, and used to beat his grooms. Now, my dear, a man who beats his grooms is just as likely to beat his wife. Wherefore, beware of strikers. And a fourth, he was a gambler, and all night over his cards, so that I would have none of him. He lost his estate and went into the Austrian service. There he was run through the body and killed in a duel by a French chevalier, who had first robbed him at faro. But do not think I let my true love know my resolution. I plagued him first, and teased him until he was humble. Then I bade him be happy, and the good man hath been happy ever since.'

Alas! I could not tease my Lord or plague him: I could not coquet with other men, even though Peggy went about saying:

'The silly wretch is in love with him: she shows it in her eyes. O the impudence!'

CHAPTER IX.

HOW LORD CHUDLEIGH WENT TO LONDON.

WITHOUT telling anyone of his intention, Lord Chudleigh posted one morning to town. I was acquainted with this news by Miss Peggy Baker, who informed me of it in her kindest manner.

'Dear Miss Pleydell,' she said, after morning service, as we were coming out of church, 'have you heard the dreadful news?'

'I have heard no news,' I replied.

'We have lost the chief ornament of the company. Yes; you may well turn pale'—I am sure I did nothing of the kind—'Lord Chudleigh has left Epsom—some say for the season: some say on account of some distaste he has conceived for the place: some say on account of previous engagements.'

'What kind of engagements?'

'I thought you would ask that. It is rumoured that he is shortly to be married to a young lady of good birth and with a fortune equal to his own. It is certain that he will not return.'

'Really!' said Nancy, who had now come to my aid, 'how shall you be able to exist, dear Miss Peggy, without him?'

'I? Oh, indeed, I am not concerned with Lord Chudleigh.'

'I mean, how can you exist when the principal subject for scandalous talk, and the chief cause of anonymous letters, is removed?'

She blushed and bit her lips.

'I think, Miss Levett,' she gasped, 'that you allow your tongue greater liberties than are consistent with good-breeding.'

'Better the tongue than the pen, dear Miss Baker,' replied Nancy. 'Come, Kitty, we will go weep the absence of this truant lord.'

'The Temple still remains—he! he!' said Miss Baker.

This was a conversation at which I could laugh, spiteful though it was. I knew not

that my lord was gone away, nor why. But one thing I knew very well. He was not gone to marry anyone. If that can be called ease which was mostly shame, I felt easy, because ordinary jealousy was not possible with me. He *could not marry, if he wished.* Poor lad! his fate was sealed with mine.

Yet, thinking over what might happen, I resolved that night upon a thing which would perhaps incense my uncle, the doctor, beyond all measure. I resolved that should that thing happen which most I dreaded, that my lord should fall in love with another woman, I would myself, without his ever knowing who had done it, release him from his ties. I knew where the doctor kept his registers: I would subtract the leaf which certified our union, and would send it to my lord: or should the doctor, as was possible, propose any legal action, I would refuse to appear or to act. Now without me the doctor was powerless.

Lord Chudleigh went to town, in fact, to see the doctor. He drove to his town house in St. James's Square, and in the morning he sallied forth and walked to the Fleet Market.

The Reverend Dr. Shovel was doing a great and splendid business. Already there were rumours of the intention of Government to bring in a bill for the suppression of these lawless Fleet marriages. Therefore, in order to stimulate the lagging, he had sent his messengers, touters, and runners abroad in every part of the city, calling on all those who wished to be married secretly, or to avoid wedding expenses, feasts, and junketings, and to be securely married, to make haste, while there was yet time. Therefore there was a throng every day from seven in the morning, of prentices with their masters' daughters, old men with their cooks, tradesmen who would avoid the feasting, sailors home for a few weeks, as eager to marry a wife as if they were to be home for the whole of their natural lives, officers who wanted to secure an heiress, and many honest folk who saw in a Fleet-wedding the easiest way of avoiding the expenses of their friends' congratulations, with the foolish charges of music, bells, dancing, and rejoicing which often cripple a young married couple for years. Why, the parents connived with the

girls, and when these ran away early in the morning, and came home falling upon their knees to confess the truth, the play had been arranged and rehearsed beforehand, and the forgiveness took the form of money for furniture instead of for feasting. But still the parents went about holding up their hands and calling heaven to witness that they could not have believed their daughter so sly and deceitful a puss.

Hither came Lord Chudleigh, heavy of heart.

The doctor at eleven in the morning was in the full swing of his work. Two couples of the lower class were being married in the house. Outside, the place was beset with wedding parties, couples coming shyly and timidly, and couples coming openly and without shame. The touters and runners of the rival Fleet parsons were fighting, swearing, cajoling and inviting people to stop with them, holding out offers of cheapness, safe marriage, expedition, secrecy, and rum punch. Strangers to London, who had never heard of Doctor Shovel's greatness, were led away to those pretenders whose canonical orders were so doubt-

ful. I believe the world at large entertains contempt for all Fleet parsons as a body (happily no longer existent), but, for my own part, while I hold the memory of the doctor in mingled shame and respect, I despise the rest because he himself held them in such low esteem.

Roger, the touter, recognised his lordship, as he made his way slowly through the mob along the side of the market.

'Good-morning, my lord,' he said—his face was bloody and bruised, his tie-wig was awry, his coat was torn, so fierce had been the struggle of the morning—'good-morning, my lord. We have not seen your lordship this long while. Would your lordship like speech with the doctor? He is busy now, and six couples wait him. Warm work it is now! But I think he will see your lordship. We should be glad to drink your lordship's health.'

The fellow made his way through the crowd, and presently returned, saying that the doctor was very near the benediction, after which he would give his lordship ten

minutes, but no longer, and should lose a guinea for every minute.

The doctor, in fact, was dismissing a pair of couples with a few words of advice. They were respectable young city people, getting the secret marriage for the reasons which I have already described.

'You are now,' he said, 'married according to the rites of holy Mother Church. You are tied to each other for life. I hope you will thank and continually bless my name for tying the knot this morning. Remember what the Church charges her children in the words of the service. Go: be honest in your dealings, thrifty in your habits, cautious in your trusts, careful of small gains; so shall you prosper. Let the husband avoid the tavern in the morning, and the conventicle on the Sunday; let the wife study plain, roast, and boiled, make her own dresses, pretend not to be a fine madam, and have no words with gallants from the west of Temple Bar.

'If, on the other hand,' he went on, knitting his brows, 'the husband spends his money in clubs, among the freemasons, and

in taverns; if he do not stick to business, if he cheat in his transactions; or if the wife go finely dressed, and talk with pretty fellows when she ought to be cleaning the furniture; if they both go not to church regularly and obey the instruction of their rector, vicar, or curate—then, I say, the fate of that couple shall be a signal example. For the husband shall be hanged at Tyburn Tree, and the wife be flogged at Bridewell. Go.'

They bowed, being overwhelmed with the terrors of this parting advice, and departed. Outside, they were greeted with a roar of rough congratulation, and were followed by the shouts of the market till they reached Fleet Bridge, where they were quickly lost in the crowd.

Then the doctor turned to Lord Chudleigh.

'Your lordship has come, I suppose,' he asked, 'to inquire after the health of her ladyship?'

'I come, Dr. Shovel,' replied my lord, gravely, 'to know from your own lips, before I commit the affair to counsel, how far I am

compromised by the disgraceful trick you played upon me about a year ago.'

'Your lordship is married,' said the doctor, simply. 'So far are you compromised, and no further. Nay, we seek no further complication in this business.'

He sat down in his wooden arm-chair, and, with his elbow on the table, knitted his bushy eyebrows, frowned, and shook his great forefinger in his visitor's face.

'Your lordship is married,' he repeated. 'Of that have no doubt; no doubt whatever is possible. Tell your lawyer all; refer him to me.'

'The story,' said Lord Chudleigh, 'is this. I come here, out of curiosity, to see you—a man of whom I had heard much, though little to your credit. I am received by you with courtesy and hospitality. There is much drinking, and I (for which I have no defence to offer) drink too much. I awake in the morning still half unconscious. I am taken downstairs by you, and married, while in that condition, to some woman I had never before seen. After this I am again put to bed. When I awake, I am informed by you what has taken place.'

'That is a story neatly told,' said the doctor. 'If I had to tell it, however, the details would assume another complexion. What brought your lordship to spend the night in such a place as the Liberties of the Fleet? A common parson of the Fleet? Nay, that is improbable; my modesty forbids me to believe so incredible a circumstance. But we may suppose an appointment for the morning; an appointment made and kept; a secret marriage——'

'Would you dare to tell such a story as that?' Lord Chudleigh interrupted the doctor with vehemence. 'Would you dare, sir, to hint that I, Lord Chudleigh, had designed a Fleet marriage?'

'My lord, where a member of your family, where your father's son is concerned, I dare a great deal, I assure you.'

'And the woman—who is she? Produce me this wretch, this creature who became an accomplice in the plot.'

'All in good time. Be assured, my lord, that we shall produce her in good time—at the right time. Also, be resigned to the inevitable. Nothing can unmarry you now.'

'I think,' said his lordship, 'that thou art the greatest villain in England.'

'Ta, ta, ta!' The doctor lay back in his chair with his arms extended and a genial laugh. 'Your lordship is not complimentary. Still I make allowances. I cannot fight you, because I am a clergyman; you can therefore say what you please. And I own that it certainly is a vexatious thing for a gentleman of your rank and position to have a wife and yet to have no wife: not to know her name and parentage. Why, she may be in the soap-suds over the family linen in the Fleet Liberties, or selling hot furmety on Fleet Bridge, or keeping a farthing sausage-stall in the Fleet Market, or making the rooms for the gentlemen in the Fleet Prison, or frying beefsteaks in Butcher Row; or she may be picking pockets in St. Paul's Churchyard, or she may be beating hemp in Bridewell, or she may be under the Alderman's rod in Newgate. Nay, my lord, do not swear in this place, which is, as one may say, a chapel-of-ease. Then her parents: your lordship's father and mother-in-law. Roger, my touter—say—may be her parent; or she may come of a dishonest stock in Turnmill Lane; or she

may be ignorant of father and mother, and may belong to the numerous family of those who sleep in the baskets of Covent Garden and the ashes of the glass-houses. I repeat, my lord, that to swear in such a place, and before such a man, a reverend divine, is impious. Avoid the habit of swearing altogether; but, if you must swear, let it be outside this house.'

'You will not, then, even tell me where she is, this wife of mine?'

'I will not, my lord.'

'You will not even let me know the depth of my degradation?'

'My lord, I will tell you nothing. As for her ladyship, I will say not a word. But as I have shown you the possibilities on one side, so I would show them to you on the other. She may be the wretched creature you fear. She may also be a gentlewoman by birth, young, beautiful, accomplished; fit, my lord, to bear your name and to be your wife.'

'No,' he cried; 'that is impossible. What gentlewoman would consent to such a marriage?'

The doctor laughed.

'There are many things in this world,' he said, that even Lord Chudleigh cannot understand. Now, my lord, if you have nothing more to say, you may leave me. There are already half a dozen expectant brides upon the threshold. One would not, sure, keep the poor things waiting. I am generally at home, my lord, in the evening, and should you feel inclined for another social night with punch, and a song over the bowl, your lordship will be welcome in spite of hard words.'

Lord Chudleigh answered not a word, but walked away.

Small comfort had he got from the doctor.

Now was he in a sad plight indeed; for his heart was altogether filled with the image of Kitty Pleydell. Yet how hope to win her? And how stand by and let her be won by another man?

To be married in such a way, not to know who or what your wife might be, is, surely, a thing quite beyond any history ever told.

CHAPTER X.

HOW TWO OLD FRIENDS CAME TO EPSOM.

The doctor's letter had informed us of the liberation of Mr. Stallabras and Sir Miles Lackington; but we were not prepared for their arrival at Epsom. They came, however, travelling together by the coach, their object being not so much, I believe, to visit the watering-place of Epsom or to enjoy its amusements, as to renew certain honourable proposals, formerly made in less happy times, to Kitty Pleydell.

Naturally, we were at first somewhat perturbed, fearing the scandal should certain tongues spread abroad the truth as to our residence in the Fleet.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Esther, with a little sigh, 'my mind is made up. We will go to Tunbridge out of their way.'

This was impossible, because they would follow us. For my own part, I looked upon the Fleet Rules with less shame than poor Mrs. Esther. To her, the memory of the long degradation was infinitely painful. For everybody, certainly, a time of degradation, however unmerited, is never a pleasant thing to remember. I think that the whole army of martyrs must agree together in forgetting the last scenes of their earthly pilgrimage. The buffetings, strippings, scourgings, roastings, burnings, and hangings, the long time of prison, the starvation, the expectancy and fear—the going forth to meet the hungry lion and the ruthless tiger—surely it cannot be comfortable to remember these. No martyr on the roll had ever been more innocent or undeserving of punishment than Mrs. Esther Pimpernel: no sufferer ever complained less: but she loved not to think of the past, nor to be reminded of it by the arrival of one whom she had known there.

Nevertheless, when Sir Miles Lackington presented himself at our lodging, he was received with a gracious friendliness.

His newly recovered liberty made little

alteration in the appearance of this prodigal son. His dress was worn in the same easy disorder, the ruffles being limp, his wig tied carelessly, the lace upon his hat torn, as if in some scuffle, and the buckles of his shoes were an odd pair. His face preserved the same jolly content, as if the gifts of Fortune were to be regarded no more than her buffeting.

'We are always,' said my guardian, with a little hesitation, 'we are always glad to welcome old friends—even friends in common misfortune. But, Sir Miles, it is not well to remind us—or—or to talk to others of those unhappy days.'

He laughed.

'I remember them not,' he said. 'I never remember any day but the present. Why should we remember disagreeable things? Formerly we borrowed; now we lend: let us go on lending till we have to borrow again. Do you remember Mr. Stallabras the poet?'

Surely, we remembered Solomon.

'He goes abroad now in a silk-lined coat with laced ruffles. He has bought a new wig and started a subscription list for a new poem, having eaten up the last before the poem was

written. I subscribed for three copies yesterday, and we pretended, both of us, he that he did not want the money, and I that I had always had it. Without forgetting and pretending, where should we be?'

'Indeed,' said Mrs. Esther, 'one would not willingly either forget or pretend. But some things are best remembered in silence. The memory of them should keep us humble, Sir Miles.'

'I do not wish to be humble,' replied the baronet. 'Humble people do not sing and drink, nor gamble, nor make love. They go in sadness and with hanging heads. I would still go proud.'

While he was with us came Solomon himself, bravely dressed indeed, with about an ell of ribbon tied around his throat, a new and fashionable wig, and bearing himself with all the dignity possible in a poet of five-feet-three. His chin was in the air and his hat under his arm when he marched into the little room.

I shook hands with him, and whispered to him not to mention the word Fleet. Thereupon he advanced to Mrs. Esther with such

a bow as would have graced a court, saying :

'Madam, I have had the honour of being presented to you in London, but I know not if I am still distinguished by your recollection.'

'Sir,' said Mrs. Esther, 'that person must indeed be blind to merit who can forget Mr. Stallabras, the favourite of the Muses.'

'Oh, madam ! this compliment——'

'Oh, sir ! our hearts are not so insensible as to forget those delightful verses, which should be the glory of an unthinking age.'

I asked him then if he had received a bequest.

'I have found what is better,' he said, 'a female Mæcenas. The virtues of antiquity linger only in the breasts of the fair. She is a person of singularly cold and calm judgment. Despréaux himself had not a cooler head or a sounder critical faculty. Therefore, when such a lady prophesies immortal renown to a poet, that poet may congratulate himself. I am poet laureate to Lady Tamarind, relict of Sir Joseph Tamarind, brewer and sometime sheriff in the city of London. Her ladyship's taste is considered infallible in all

subjects, whether china, tulips, plays, pictures, fans, snuff-boxes, black boys, or poets.'

His eyes twinkled so brightly, his turn-up nose seemed so joyfully to sniff the incense of praise, prosperity had already made his cheeks so sleek and fat, that we could hardly recognise our starveling poet.

'The taste,' said Mrs. Esther, 'of a woman who recognises the merit of your verses, Mr. Stallabras, is beyond a doubt.'

He rubbed his hands and laughed.

'I was already out—' he began, but as we all manifested the greatest confusion at the beginning of this confession, he stopped and turned red. 'I mean I was—I was——'

'You were beginning, I think,' I interrupted, 'to open a new subscription.'

'Thank you, Miss Kitty,' he replied. 'I was—as soon as I left the Ru—I mean, as soon as I could, I went round among my patrons with my project. This lady immediately bought all my previous poems, including the translation of "Lucretius" which the rascal publisher declared had been his ruin, when he went bankrupt, and presented me with a hundred guineas, with which I

was enabled—' here he surveyed his person with satisfaction, and raised one leg to get a better view of his stockings and shoe-buckles —' I was enabled to procure garments more suitable to a personage of ambition, and to present myself to the honourable company assembled at Epsom on a footing of easy equality.'

' But a hundred guineas will not last for ever,' I said, thinking of the sums of money which I had already spent on frocks and ribbons since we came from London.

' That is not all,' he said ; ' I have my new volume of poems, which has been subscribed by Lady Tamarind and her friends. This is a change, is it not, Miss Kitty ? Formerly, when I was in the Ru—I mean, before my good-fortune came,—a sixpenny ordinary was beyond me : I have lived upon half-a-crown for a week : I have written lines on a "Christian's Joys" when starving : and I have composed the "Lamentations of a Sinner" when contemplating suicide as the only relief from my troubles. Now—now—how different ! Fortune's wheel has turned —Fame is mine. And as for poems, I can

write as many as I please to give the world, and always find a subscription list ready to my hand. This brain, Miss Kitty, like the fountain of Helicon, will run for ever; that is, while life and Lady Tamarind remain.'

'The stream may get muddy sometimes,' said Sir Miles, with a smile.

Fate, which condemns poets to poverty, also compensates them with hope. If they are in present sunshine, it will last for ever: if in cold neglect, the future will give what the past has refused: posterity will continue to wave the censing-pot and send up wreaths of spicy smoke, a continual flow, grateful to the blessed spirit above: so that, fortunate or in neglect, they dwell in a perpetual dream, which keeps them ever happy.

Then the sanguine bard drew forth his new subscription list.

'I call it,' he said, 'by the modest title of a "Project for the Publication of a New Collection of Odes and Heroic Pieces," by Solomon Stallabras, Esquire. I am aware that my birth gives no warrant for the assumption of the rank of Esquire, but Lady Tamarind is good enough to say that the

possession of genius lifts a man to the level of the gentry, if not the nobility of the country.'

'It does, Solomon; it does,' said Sir Miles.

'I venture, ladies, therefore,' he said, taking a pencil from his pocket, 'to solicit your honoured names as subscribers for this poor effort of a (perhaps) too ambitious bran. The poems, when completed, will be printed in royal quarto, with a portrait of the author as he appears crowned by Fame, while the Graces (draped for the occasion in the modern taste) stand behind him: Cupid will raise aloft the trumpet of Fame: the Muses will be seen admiring from a gentle eminence which represents Parnassus: Apollo will be figured presenting the poet with his own lyre, and the sacred stream will flow at his feet—my own design. In the distance the skin of Marsyas will hang upon a tree, as a warning to the presumption of rivals. The work will be bound in calf, and will be issued at the price of two guineas. For that small sum, ladies, Solomon Stallabras offers a copy of his poems.'

'Oh, Mr. Stallabras!' cried Mrs. Esther,

'for so charming a picture I would give not two but twenty guineas, to say nothing of the poems. Go on, dear sir; raise our thoughts to virtue, and strengthen our inclinations in the path of duty. Poets, indeed, make the way to heaven a path of roses.'

Now here was a change from old times! Solomon flourishing a subscription list in lace and silk, and Mrs. Esther offering guineas by the dozen! Sir Miles, who was leaning by the window just as he had been wont to do in our poor lodging, nodded and laughed, unseen by Mrs. Esther.

'Permit me, sir,' she said, 'if you will be so good, to put my name down for——'

'Oh, madam!' The poet bowed low and brandished his pencil.

'For ten copies of this immortal work, in one of which I would ask you to write your name, in your own hand, for the enrichment of the volume and the admiration of posterity.'

'Madam,' said Solomon, with emotion, 'I will write my name in the whole ten.'

'And, dear sir, one copy for Miss Kitty.'

'Such generosity! such princessly, noble patronage of the Poetical Art!' he fairly chuckled as he wrote down the names. 'Eleven copies! Twenty-two guineas! This is indeed to realize fame.'

He received the money which Mrs. Esther paid him with a countenance all smiles, although he vainly tried to throw into his expression the pride of the poet, to whom money is but filthy lucre.

We then conversed on Epsom and its beauties, and as the gentlemen had as yet seen none of them, I proposed to lead them to the Downs, whence I promised them such a landscape as should infinitely rejoice their eyes. They accepted with expressions of gratitude, and we started. When, however, we came to the doors of the Spread Eagle, Sir Miles recollected that at twelve he always took a tankard of cool October for the good of his health. He therefore left us, promising to follow. But as he did not come, and we saw him no more that day, I suppose he found the society of the tankard more enchanting than that of Kitty Pleydell. We therefore walked up the hill alone, and pre-

sently stood upon the open down, which commands so noble a view. The place was quite deserted that day, save for a single group of gentlemen, who were conducting a match, but so far off that we heard not their voices.

I took advantage of this solitude to convey to the poet an instruction that it would be better not to talk freely at Epsom concerning such vicissitudes of fortune as we had experienced. I pointed out to him that until Mrs. Esther's position was securely fixed it might do her injury to have her story garbled by censorious tongues; that, for his own sake, his late connection with the Liberties of the Fleet would be better concealed; and that, for myself, although it mattered less, because I was never a prisoner while yet an inmate of the Rules, I did not wish my story, such as it was, to be passed about the Wells, and mangled in the telling.

Mr. Stallabras declared stoutly that he would not for worlds reveal one word about the past—for my sake.

'Nay,' I said, 'not for mine, but for the sake of that dear lady to whom you owe so much.'

'It is true,' he said; 'I owe her even life. She hath fed me from her slender stores when I was starving. And when no one would even read my verses she would learn them by heart and repeat them with tears. For her sake, then, if not for yours.'

Then his face assumed an expression like unto that with which he had once before made me an offer of his hand, and I knew that he was going to do it again. If such a thing is going to be done, the sooner it is over the better. Therefore I waited with calmness, hoping that the paroxysm would be short and not violent.

'Miss Kitty,' he began, turning very red, 'some time ago I was penniless, almost starving, and detained in the (absurdly called) Liberties of the Fleet for the amount of forty pounds sixteen shillings and eightpence—a sum so small that it made me blush to confess it, most of my friends in the same place being incarcerated for substantial sums of hundreds and even thousands. In this difficult position, which required the philosophy of a Stoic to endure with resignation, I had the temerity to offer my hand to the most beautiful

woman in the world. I have often, since, wondered at my own audacity and her gentleness while she refused so presumptuous a proposal.'

'Indeed, Mr. Stallabras,' I said, 'you conferred great honour upon me.'

He bowed.

'The position of affairs,' he went on, 'is now changed. The poet's brows are crowned with bays by the hand of a lady as skilled in poets as she is in pug-dogs; his pockets are lined with guineas; as for the Fleet Rules—I whistle the memory of the place to the winds. Phew! it is gone, never to return: I see before me a long and great future, when booksellers will compete for the honour of publishing me, and the greatest lords and ladies in the land will rush to subscribe for copies. Like Shakespeare, I shall amass a fortune: like Prior, I shall receive offers of embassies: like Addison and Chaucer, I shall be placed in posts of honour and profit.'

'I hope, Mr. Stallabras,' I said, 'that such will indeed be your future.'

'Do you, really, hope so, Miss Kitty?' His face flushed again, and I was quite sorry

for him, knowing the pain I was about to inflict upon him. 'Do you hope so? Then that emboldens me to say—Fairest of your sex, divine nymph, accept the homage of a poet: be celebrated for ever in his immortal verse. Be my Laura! Let me be thy Petrarch!'

'I will,' I replied. 'I accept that offer joyfully. I will be to you what Laura was to Petrarch, if that will content you.'

I gave him my hand, which he seized with rapture.

'Oh, beautiful Kitty!' he cried, with such joy in his eyes that I repented having said so much, 'fortune has now bestowed upon me all I ask. When, goddess, wilt thou crown my happiness?'

'It is already crowned,' I replied. 'I have given you, Mr. Stallabras, all you asked for. Let me remind you that you yourself told me the story of Petrarch's love. I will be your Laura, but I must have the liberty of doing what Laura did—namely, the right to marry some one else.'

His face fell.

'Oh!' he murmured. 'Why did I not say Heloïse?'

'Because she was shut up in a convent. Come, Mr. Stallabras, let us remain friends, which is far better for both of us, and less trying to the temper than being lovers. And I will help you with your subscription-book. As for being married, you would tire of me in a week.'

Upon this he fell to protesting that it was impossible for any man to tire of such a paragon among women, and I dare say the poor deluded creature really meant what he said, because men in love are blind. When this failed to move me, he lamented his ill-fortune in having placed his hopes upon the heart of a beautiful statue as cold as Dian. Nor was it until he had prophesied death to himself and prayed for ruin and loss of his fame, both of which, he said, were now useless, or comparatively useless to him, that I succeeded in making him, to a certain extent, reasonable, and calming his anger. He really had thought that so grand an offer of marriage with a poet, whom he placed on about the same level with Homer, would tempt any woman. According to some detractors of the fair sex, every woman believes that every man must

fall in love with her: but I am sure that there is no man who does not believe that he is irresistible when once he begins to show a preference or an inclination.

I then persuaded him, with honeyed words, to believe in my sorrow that I was not able to accept his proposals: and I added that as he had by this time sufficiently admired the beauties of the landscape, we might return to the town, when I should have the honour of presenting him to some of the better sort among the visitors.

He came down the hill with me, sighing after the manner of poets in love, and panting a little, because he was fat and short of breath, and I walked fast.

We found the Terrace crowded with people congregated for the morning talk; the breakfasts being all eaten, the tea-drinking over, morning prayers finished, and the music playing merrily.

I presented the poet to Lady Levett as an ingenious gentleman whose verses, known all over town, were doubtless already well known to her ladyship. She had not the hardness of heart to deny knowledge of the

poet, and gave him a kindly welcome to Epsom, where, she said, she had no doubt whatever but that he would meet with the reception due to qualities of such distinction.

Then I ventured to suggest that Mr. Stallabras was receiving names for a subscription edition of his new poems. Lady Levett added hers, and begged the poet to visit her at her lodging where she would discharge her debt.

In the course of an hour I presented Stallabras to young Lord Eardesley, Harry Temple, and half the gentlemen at the Wells, asking of each a subscription to the poems, so that the fortunate poet found himself some fifty guineas the richer by his morning's work.

'Miss Kitty,' he said, humbly, 'I knew not, indeed, that you were so great a lady. The "Queen of the Wells," I am told. Not but all who know your worth and kindness must rejoice at this signal triumph. I now plainly see why I must be content with the lot of Petrarch.'

Once launched in society, the poet became quickly a kind of celebrity. Just as, in some

years, a watering-place would boast of having among its visitors such famous men as Dr. Johnson, Mr. Garrick, or Mr. Richardson, so now it pointed to Mr. Stallabras, and said to strangers, 'See! The great Mr. Stallabras! The illustrious poet!'

He, like all men born in London, was equal to the opportunity, and rose on the wave of fashion; his subscription list kept mounting up; he sent his poems to the press; he received proofs and read them beneath the portico, which he compared to the columns where the Roman poets had been accustomed to read their compositions. We gathered round and listened; we cried, with our handkerchiefs to our eyes: 'O Mr Stallabras, how fine! how wondrous pathetic! how just!' Then would he bow and twist, and wave his hand, and wag his head.

He became an oracle, and, like all oracles in the matter of taste, he quickly learned to give the law. He affected to understand pictures, and talked about the 'brio' of one painter, and the 'three-lights' rule of another; he was very sarcastic in the matter of poetry, and would allow but two good

poets in the century—himself and Mr. Alexander Pope; in the region of romance he would allow little credit to Fielding, but claimed immortality for Richardson.

'Oh, sir, pardon me,' he said to one who attributed the greater merit to the former writer. 'Pardon me. The characters and the situations of Fielding are so wretchedly low and dirty that I cannot imagine anyone being interested in them. There is, I admit, some strength of humour in him, but he hath over-written himself. I doubt he is a strong, hulking sort of man.'

'But, sir,' said Lady Levett, 'we ladies like men to be strong and hearty as becomes a man. You surely do not mean that every big man must have low tastes.'

'The mind and the body are united,' said the little poet, 'they influence one another. Thus, in a weak frame we find delicacy, and in a strong frame, bluntness. Softness and tenderness of mind are often remarkable in a body possessed of the same qualities. Tom Jones could get drunk on the night of his uncle's recovery—no doubt Mr. Fielding would manifest his joy in the same manner.'

He went on to assure us that Lady Bellaston was an intimate friend of Mr. Fielding's; that Booth was himself; Tom Jones, again, himself; Amelia his first wife; his brawls, gaols, sponging-houses, and quarrels all drawn from his own personal experience.

'He who associates with low companions, ladies,' concluded the ex-prisoner of the Fleet, 'must needs himself be low. Taste consorts only with tasteful persons.'

'Should not a lady be beautiful, Mr. Stallabras?' asked a bystander. 'I always supposed so, but since a man is not to be strong, perhaps I was wrong.'

'Sir!' Mr. Stallabras drew himself up to his full height, and his fingers closed upon the roll of proof-sheets as if it had been a sword-hilt. 'Sir! all ladies—who have taste—are beautiful. I am ready to be the champion of the sex. Some are more beautiful than others,' here he raised his eyes to me and sighed. 'Some flowers are more beautiful than others. The man of taste loves to let his eyes rest on such a pleasing object,'—here two young gentlemen winked at each other—'she is a credit to her sex. When goodness

is joined to such beauty, as is the case with——' here he looked at me and hesitated.

'Oh!' cried Nancy, 'say with *me*, Mr. Stallabras, or Miss Peggy Baker.'

'May I say Miss Pleydell?' he asked, with a comprehensive smile. 'There, indeed, is all Clarissa, and the heart of sensibility, in contemplating her perfections, reverts to the scenes of our divine Richardson.'

CHAPTER XI.

HOW SIR MILES RENEWED HIS OFFER.

Thus did I get rid of one suitor, knowing that there were still two more in the field, and anxious about my lord's absence, which, I doubted not, was concerned in some way with me. Heavens! if he should find out the secret! If the doctor should communicate to him the thing which I desired to tell at my own time and place.

The Evil One, at this juncture, suggested a temptation of his own.

Suppose a message, which my lord could trust, were to reach him, stating that there would be no attempt to follow up the so-called marriage in the Rules, that he could go his own way, unmolested; that the very certificate and the leaf of the register contain-

ing the proof of the marriage would be restored to him—how would that be ?

Yet, what sort of happiness could a wife expect who every day had to fear the chance of detection and exposure ? Some time or other he would learn that I was the niece of the man who had dealt him this blow ; some day he would learn the whole story. Why, there was not only the doctor, but his man Roger, the villain with the pale face, the scarred cheeks, and the red nose. If the doctor were dead, what would prevent such a man from telling the story abroad and proclaiming it to all comers ?

For poor Kitty there was only one course open : she must work her way to happiness through shame and confession. Yet with all the shame and confession there was no certainty that the happiness would follow. A man vehemently loves and desires a woman, but a woman vehemently desires the love and desire of a man. I desired, with all my strength and with all my might, the affections of my lord. His image, his idea, were with me always. For me there was no other man in the world.

But first I had to deal with my present suitors.

Solomon dismissed, and made happy with praise and guineas (a poet is a creature whose vanity seems always to outweigh all other qualities), I had next to reckon with Sir Miles, who was more reasonable and yet more persistent.

I knew that he had come to Epsom on purpose to seek me out. That was borne in upon me with a force not to be resisted. He always did me the honour of showing me a preference when we lived under the same roof, and when he would lie in wait for me at the foot of the sanded stairs. And, of course, I liked him. He was good-natured, he had the *air noble;* he would not, certainly, beat his wife or treat her unkindly, although he would probably spend all the money in drink and play. And whether he was rich or poor, in the Rules or in the Prison, or wandering free, he would still be the same easy, careless creature, happy as the sunshine, happier by candlelight, over a bowl of punch.

On the Terrace, where we met him in the afternoon, he was the same, save that his

clothes were newer, as when, just as he lounged now beneath the trees, he had then lounged among the bulkheads and stalls of the market, till evening came with the joys of the day. Always with the carriage of a gentleman. Most of the beaux of Epsom were such gentlemen as claim the title of Esquire by right of their profession as attorneys, barristers, officers, nabobs, rich merchants, and the like. As for their manners, they were easy so long as they were natural, and then they were somewhat barbarous; when they endeavoured to assume the manners of such as Lord Chudleigh, they were awkward. As for the young fellows from the country estates, they were always clowns: they came clowns to the Wells: they put on fine clothes: laughed and grimaced: lost their money at horse-racing and lansquenet, and went home clowns. But Sir Miles was always, even when drunk, a gentleman.

I suppose he had the impudence, at first, to suppose that I was going to seek him out and distinguish him before all the company with my particular regard. When he discovered that it was difficult to get speech

with the Queen of the Wells unless you joined her court, he came along with the rest, and was speedily as ready with his compliment, his innuendo, his jest, and his anecdote. He was more ready than most because he had seen the great world in his youth, and had caught their manner. The general run of gallants were, it seemed to me, afraid of him. To be sure, he was a big, strong man, could have crunched two or three of the slender beaux between his arms : yet he was the most kind-hearted fellow in the world.

Three days after his arrival, Lord Chudleigh having then been away for a week, and I beginning to wonder what business kept him so long from the apron-strings of Kitty, he invited me to go with him to the Downs to see a match. I would go with him, though well I knew what he meant ; and, of course, when we got to the Downs, the match was over and the people going home.

'Egad, Miss Kitty,' he said, 'there is always such a plaguy crowd after your ladyship's heels, that a man gets never a chance of a word with you, save edgeways with the pretty little beaux. Well, I have told Solo-

mon to go to the house and take care of Mrs. Esther. There they are, cheek by jowl, and her handkerchief up to her eyes over his sentimental poetry. You and I can have a talk to ourselves. It is only a quarter of a mile from here to your lodging, but, if you like to come with me by way of the old well and Banstead, we can make it half a mile.'

'Thank you, Sir Miles,' I said; 'I am not anxious to double that quarter of a mile. Consider, if you please, that I have to get home, dine, and dress for the day.'

'Very good. Have it your own way. That, to be sure, you always will have. I think, for my part, that you never looked so nice as when you wore your hair in curls, and a holland frock. Miss Kitty, do you remember a certain day when a baronet, out at elbows, offered you his hand—with nothing in it?'

'I remember it perfectly.' I laughed at the recollection. 'And oh,' Sir Miles, to think of how you looked when you made that condescending proposal. It was after a most disgraceful evening—you best know where. You had been brought home singing.

Your neck-ribbon was untied, your wig awry, your hand shaky, your cheeks red, and in your left hand a brown mug full of old October. What a suitor!'

'Yes,' he replied, laughing, without the least appearance of being offended by my picture. 'When in the Rules, I behaved according to the custom of the place. I am no longer in the Rules, but at the Wells. I remember that tankard. Considering that the day is sultry, I wish I had one in my hand this very moment.'

'I am sure, Sir Miles, that your conduct under these happier circumstances will reflect greater credit upon you.'

'Happier circumstances?' he said. 'Well, I suppose so. In the Fleet I could borrow of my cousins a guinea a week or thereabout; yet borrowing is uncertain and undignified: the manner of living was cheap, but it was rude. Drink there was—more than one had a right to expect; drink was plentiful, but only the doctor got good punch; no morals were expected of a Fleet Rules Christian. I know not that things are happier now than then. However, you might think so. Girls never

have any philosophy. I have come into a small estate of six hundred pounds a year. It is not so much, by five times six hundred, as what I started with; still, with six hundred a year, one can live. Do you not think so?'

'It seems to me a very handsome provision,' I replied, thinking that Mrs. Esther had about the same.

'Yes, it will do.'

He fanned his face with his hat, and begged me to sit down on the grass and listen to him for a moment. Men, even the most careless, like Sir Miles, have a way of becoming suddenly solemn when they ask a woman to become their wife. I know not whether their gravity springs from a sense of their own great worth, or from a feeling of unworthiness; whether it is a compliment to the woman they woo, or to themselves. Or it may be a confession of the holiness of the state of matrimony, which one would fain hope to be the case.

Sir Miles then, blushing and confused, offered me, for the second time, his hand.

'You see,' he said, 'the right hand doth no longer shake, nor doth the left hand hold

a pot of October. I no longer am carried home at night.' He sighed, as if the reminiscence of past times was pleasing but saddening. 'I am not any more the man that once I was. Will you, sweet Kitty—will you be Lady Lackington ?'

'I cannot,' I said.

'There is an income of six hundred pounds a year,' he went on. 'I believe there is a small house somewhere ; we could live in it rent-free. You were always fond of hens and pigs, and milk, flowers, apples, and all these things. I will keep two hundred pounds for myself, and give you four. With two hundred I shall have to manage, once a week or so, a little hazard, or a trifling lansquenet.'

'What ?' I asked. 'Marry a gamester ?'

'What matter as to that, when he will settle his money on his wife ? Think of it, Kitty. I am a baronet, though a poor one, and of as good a family as any in Norfolk. Why, the Lackingtons, as everybody knows, were on their lands before the Conqueror.'

'And if it is not enough to be a gamester, you are also—oh, Sir Miles ! the shame of it——'

'We gentlemen of Norfolk,' he replied, without any appearance of shame, 'are honest topers all. I deny it not. Yet what matters such a trifle in the habits of a man? Did any gentleman in the county drink harder than my father? Yet he was hale and tough at sixty, and would have lived to eighty but for a fall he got riding home one night after dinner, having a cask, or thereabouts, of port inside him, by reason of which he mistook an open quarry for the lane which should have led him home, and therefore broke his neck.'

'So that, if his wife loved him, as no doubt she did, it was the drink that robbed her of a husband. Your tale hath a useful moral, Sir Miles.'

'Come, pretty Puritan, look at me. I am twenty-nine—in my thirtieth year; strong and hearty, if I do get drunk of an evening. What then? Do you want to talk to your husband all night? Better know that he is safe asleep, and likely to remain asleep till the drink is gone out of his head.'

'Oh, the delights of wedlock! To have your husband brought home every night by four stout fellows!'

'Evening drink hurts no man. Have I a bottle nose? Do my hands shake? Are my cheeks fat and pale? Look at me, Kitty.' He held out his arms and laughed.

'Yes, Sir Miles,' I replied; 'I think you are a very lusty fellow, and, in a wrestling-bout, I should think few could stand against you. But as a husband, for the reasons I have stated, I say—No!'

'Take the four hundred, Kitty, and make me happy. I love thee, my girl, with all my heart.'

'Sir Miles, I cannot do it honestly. Perhaps I wish I could.'

'You won't?' He looked me full in the face. 'I see you won't. You have such a tell-tale, straightforward face, Kitty, that it proclaims the truth always. I believe you are truth itself. They pulled you out of a well, down in your country place, in a bucket, and then went about saying you had been born.'

'Thank you, Sir Miles.'

'Am I, therefore, to go hang myself in my garters, or yours, if you will give them to me?'

'If you do, I shall be the first to run and cut you down.'

'Sweet it were,' he murmured, 'to be even cut down by your fair hand. If one was sure that you would come in time——'

'You will be reasonable, dear sir, and you will neither say nor do anything silly.'

'I do not suppose I shall pine away in despair; nor shall I hang my head; nor shall I go about saying that there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, because, when we fished you, we fished the best. And I swear, Kitty'—here he did swear after men's profane way, but he needed not to have sworn so loudly or so long—'that truly, sweet Kitty, thou art the fairest, the loveliest, and the best fish that ever came out of any sea—a bewitching mermaid! I wish thee a good husband.

> 'On Stella's lap he laid his head,
> And, looking in her eyes,
> He cried, "Remember, when I'm dead,
> That I deserved the prize."'

'Thank you, Sir Miles. A shorter and a less profane oath would surely have better graced the subject.'

'It cannot be graced too much,' he said, as if to swear lustily was to confer honour upon the woman he thought to love. 'For your sake, Kitty, I would ever forswear punch, tobacco, and strong waters; drink nothing but October; and never get drunk save on Saturday nights: for your sake would I go live in the country among the cocks and the hens, the ducks and the pigs: for you would I go religiously to church every Sunday at forenoon, and expect the parson for the beef and pudding after the sermon: for your sake would I gamble no more, save once in a way when quarter-day brought in the rents.'

'That would be a mighty reformation indeed, Sir Miles.'

'Now, however, since you will not have me, I shall play with four hundred a year out of the six. But I will be careful, all the same: I shall punt low, and never lose more than a guinea a night.'

Thus I was rid of my second suitor. Sir Miles ceased to attend the court of followers who attended on the Terrace, but sat all day in the card-room, playing. From time to time he met and saluted me.

'Be not afraid,' he would say, 'on my behalf. The card-tables are more pleasant than the air under the trees, and I think the players are better company than your priggish popinjays. As for my habits, fair Kitty, pattern of virtue, they have become virtuous. I am never drunk—well, not often—and you have brought me luck. I have won five hundred guineas from a nabob. Think of the joy, when he pays me, of losing it all again!'

CHAPTER XII.

HOW HARRY TEMPLE PROVED HIS VALOUR.

Thus were poet and baronet reduced to submission. The third suitor was harder to manage, because he turned sulky. Sportsmen have said that a fish, or a bird, or a fox, when he sulks, is then most difficult to secure. Thus, to be captured or cajoled, the victim must be in a good temper.

Now Harry Temple went in gloomy indignation, as was visible to all eyes. He walked alone upon the Terrace, or sat alone in the Assembly Room, a Killjoy to behold. That would not have mattered, because no girl feels much sorrow for a man who foolishly sulks because he cannot marry her; but everybody knew, or thought they knew, the cause of his heavy looks. Peggy Baker said I had

thrown him over for the sake of a lord, who, she added, kindly, would certainly throw me over in turn. Some of the company cried shame on the flinty-hearted woman who could let so pretty a fellow go love-sick.

'Kitty,' his melancholy seemed to say, 'you left us a simple country girl: you would have been proud of my addresses had you understood my meaning'—this was quite true: 'you are now a woman of fashion, and you have ambition: your head is turned with flattery: you aspire to nothing short of a coronet. In those days you were satisfied with the approval of your looking-glass and your conscience: now you would draw all men to your heels, and are not happy unless you make them all miserable.' But that was not true at all; I did not wish to make men miserable; and it was nothing to me whether they were miserable or happy. I thought of one man only, as is natural to a woman in love.

'If,' I said to him one day, being tired by such exhibition of temper, 'if you do not like the place, why make yourself unhappy by staying here? Cambridge, methinks, would be a more fitting abode for you, where

there are books and scholars : not a watering-place, where people come together to amuse themselves and be merry.'

'I shall stay here,' he replied, 'until I find there is no hope for me.'

'Oh, silly Harry!' I said; 'is there no other woman in the world who will make you happy, except poor Kitty Pleydell?'

'No—none,' he shook his melancholy wig, the tie at the back of his head wagging sorrowfully.

How was it possible to have any sympathy with so rueful a lover? Why, it made one ridiculous. Everybody said that Harry Temple was in love with me, that I, for the worst of motives, viz. to catch a coronet, refused him, and that he was an excellent match, especially for one who was nothing better than a country parson's daughter.

'I believe only a curate, my dear,' Peggy Baker would say. 'No doubt she lived on bacon fat and oatmeal, and knitted her own stockings. And yet she refuses Harry Temple, a pretty fellow, though studious, and a man whom any of us, gentlewomen born, would be glad to encourage.'

'Oh!' I said to him, 'why do you not go? Why do you look reproaches on me?'

'Because,' he replied, 'I still love you, unworthy as you are.'

'Unworthy? Mr. Temple, methinks that a little civility——'

'Yes, unworthy. I say that a girl who throws over her oldest friends with the almost avowed intention of securing a title, without knowing anything of the character of the man who bears it——'

'This is too much,' I said. 'First, sir, let me know what there is against Lord Chudleigh's character. Tell me, upon your word, sir, do you know anything at all? Is he not a man of principle and honour?'

'I know nothing against him. I dare say that he is what you think.'

'Well, sir; and in the next place, how dare you accuse me of deliberately trying to attract my lord? Do you know me so well as to read my soul? Do you know me so well as to be justified to yourself when you attribute such a motive to me?'

'What other motive can I attribute to

you?' he asked bitterly. 'Is he not a peer? Is he not rich?'

'Oh, Harry!' I cried, 'you will drive me mad between you. Cannot a peer be a good man? Cannot a girl—I say—may not a girl——Harry, you force me to say it—is it not possible for a girl to fall in love with a man who is even a peer and a rich man? Go, sir! you have humbled me and made me say words of which I am ashamed. Go, if you please, and tell all the world what I have said.'

Then he fell to asking my forgiveness. He was, he said, wretched indeed: he had long lost my love.

'Man!' I said, 'you never had it!'—and now he was like to lose my friendship.

This talk about friendship between a man and woman when both are young seems to me a mighty foolish thing. For if the woman is in love with some one else her friendship is, to be sure, worth just nothing at all, because she must needs be for ever thinking of the man she loves. There is but one man in all the world for her, and that man not he who would fain be her friend. Therefore she

gives not a thought to him. Now if a man be in love with one woman and 'in friendship' with another, I think that either his love for one must be a poor lukewarm passion, which I, for one, would not be anxious to receive, or his friendship for the other must be a chilly sort of thing.

However, one must not be angry for ever: Harry Temple had made me say a thing which I could not have said to any woman—not even Nancy—and was ashamed of having said: yet when he begged forgiveness I accorded it to him. Harry, I was sure, would not repeat what I had said.

Somebody about this time wrote another of those little worthless epigrams or poems, and handed it about.

> 'Kitty, a fair Dissenter grown,
> Sad pattern doth afford:
> The Temple's laws she will not own,
> Yet still doth love her Lord.'

'Do not be angry, Kitty,' said Nancy. 'This is the penalty of greatness. What would Peggy Baker give to be lampooned? Harry is a fool, my dear. Any woman could tell, with half an eye, that you are not the least in love

with him. What are the eyes of men like? Are they so blinded by vanity as not to be able to see, without being told, when they are disagreeable objects for a woman's contemplation?'

'I condole with you, Miss Pleydell,' said Peggy Baker. 'To be the victim of an irreligious and even impious epigram must be truly distressing to one, like yourself, brought up in the bosom of the Church.'

'Thank you, dear Miss Peggy,' I replied, returning her smiling courtesy. 'The epigram's wound is easily healed. Is it true that you are yourself the author?'

'Oh Lord, no!' she replied. 'I am but a poor poet, and could not for the world write or say anything to wound another woman's feelings.'

'She would not, indeed, dear Kitty,' cried Nancy, who was with me. 'It is not true—though you may hear it so stated—that Miss Peggy said yesterday on the Parade that your father was only a curate, and that you made your own stockings. She is the kindest and most generous of women. We think so, truly, dear Miss Peggy. We would willingly, if we could, send you half-a-dozen or so of

our swains to swell your train. But they will not leave us.'

Was there ever so saucy a girl?

Miss Peggy bit her lips, and I think she would have liked to box Nancy's ears there and then, had she dared. But a few gentlemen were standing round us, laughing at Nancy's sally. So she refrained.

'Oh, Miss Nancy!' she replied, trying to laugh, 'you are indeed kind. But I love not the attentions of men at secondhand. You are welcome to all my cast-off lovers. Pray, Miss Pleydell, may I ask when we may expect his lordship back again?'

'I do not know,' I replied. 'Lord Chudleigh does not send me letters as to his movements or intentions.'

'I said so,' she replied, triumphant for the moment. 'I said so this morning at the book-shop, when they were asking each other what news of Lord Chudleigh. Some said Miss Pleydell would surely know: I said that I did not think there was anything between his lordship and Miss Pleydell: and I ventured to predict that you knew no more about his movements than myself.'

'Indeed,' said Nancy, coming to my assistance. 'I should have thought you were likely to know more than Kitty.'

'Indeed, why?'

'Because,' said Nancy, laughing, 'his lordship, who is, I believe, one of your cast-off lovers, might perhaps have written to you for old acquaintance' sake.'

Miss Peggy had no reason for loving me, who had dethroned her, but she had reason for hating Nancy, who always delighted in bringing her to open shame.

'What have I done to you, Miss Levett?' she asked her once, when they were alone. 'You are not the reigning Toast: I am not jealous of you: you have done no harm to me, nor I to you. Yet you delight in saying the most ill-natured things.'

'You have done nothing to me, Miss Peggy,' Nancy told her. 'But you have done a great deal to my poor Kitty, who is innocence itself. You have slandered her: you have traduced her family, which everybody knows is as good as your own, though her father was a country clergyman and a younger son: you have denied her beauty:

you have written anonymous letters to her, calumniating a young nobleman who, I verily believe, is a paragon of peers. No doubt, too, you have written letters to him calumniating her character. Truly, with the best intentions, you could not do much to hurt her, for my Kitty is above suspicion.'

'Very well, miss,' said Miss Peggy; 'very well: we understand each other. As for your charges about anonymous letters——'

'We keep them all,' said Nancy; 'and with them a letter written and signed by yourself. And I think I shall show the letters about on the Terrace.'

'If you dare——' but here she checked herself, though in a great rage. 'You will do as you please, Miss Levett. I shall know, some day, how to revenge myself for your insults. As for your curate's girl, I warrant her innocence and her being "above suspicion"—indeed!—to be pretty hypocrisy and pretence. As if any woman was above suspicion!'

'Oh!' said Nancy, as a parting shot, 'nobody, I assure you, ever thought Miss Peggy Baker or any of her friends above suspicion.

Let us do you, dear miss, so much justice. You shall not find us ungrateful or unmindful of the benefits you have conferred, or are about to confer upon us. Malice and spite, when they are impotent, are amusing, like the tricks of a monkey in a cage, or a bear dancing at a stake.'

Such angry passions as these disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of the Wells. What use was it for Mr. Nash, of Bath, to deprive the gentlemen of their swords when he left the ladies their tongues? 'The tongue can no man tame: it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.'

The accident which followed, a day or two after this, may or may not have been instigated by an enemy. Nancy always declared it was, but then she may have been prejudiced, and we never got at the truth.

Every Friday or Saturday there came down from London a coach full of gentlemen from the city or the Inns of Court, to spend two or three days at the Wells. These were our most noisy visitors: they pushed into the coteries, and endeavoured to form part of the trains of the beauties in vogue:

they drank too much wine: gambled fiercely for small sums; and turned the quiet decorum of the assembly into a babel of riot, noise, loud laughter, coarse jokes, and ill-breeding. The Sunday was thus spoiled: those of us who loved quiet stayed, for the most part, at home when we were not in church, or wandered on the quiet Downs, where we were undisturbed. Solomon Stallabras attended us on these occasions, and we turned our conversation on grave matters. I exhorted him, for instance, to direct his splendid genius to the creation of a sacred epic, which should be to the eighteenth century what Milton's 'Paradise Lost' was to the seventeenth. He promised to think of it, and we talked over various plans. The Deluge, St. Paul, the Apocalypse, were discussed in turn: for my own part, I thought that the Book of Revelations would prove a subject too sublime for our poet's strength, and recommended, as a fitter subject for his easy and graceful verses, the life and travels of St. Paul. In these considerations we forgot, for awhile, the calumnies of our enemy, and each put aside, for a time, his own private anxieties.

One Saturday evening, while Lord Chudleigh was still away, a noisier party than usual were in the Assembly Rooms, and although there was no dancing, the talk and quarrelling of the gamblers were incessant, while lights were hung out among the trees, and the walk was crowded with people. Neither Nancy nor I was present, having little desire to be stared at by ill-bred young citizens or pushing Templars. Unfortunately, Harry Temple was among them.

While he was idling among the trees there passed him a group of three young fellows, all talking together noisily. I suppose they had been drinking. One of them, unfortunately, caught sight of Harry, and began to laugh. Then they stopped, and then one stepped forward and made Harry a profound bow.

'We welcome,' he said, 'the Knight of the Rueful Countenance. We condole with your misfortune.

'"Her Temple's rule she doth not own,
Though still she loves her Lord."'

Harry was not only melancholy, but also, as some such men are, he was choleric; and

he was strong, being bred and brought up to country pursuits. In a moment his cane was in one hand and his assailant's cravat was in his other. Then he began to beat the man with his cane.

The others stood stupid with amazement. Sir Miles, who was on his way to the tables, and had seen the beginning of the fray, stepped to the front.

'Who interferes with Mr. Temple has to do with me,' he shouted. 'Fair play, gentlemen. Let them fight it out with fists like men, first—and stick each other afterwards with rapiers like Frenchmen, if they like. Gentlemen, I am Sir Miles Lackington, Baronet, at your service, if anyone wants a little breathing.'

He held his cane in readiness, but the other gentlemen kept aloof. When Harry had spent his rage, because, so far as I can learn, there was no resistance, he shook off his opponent, adjusted his wig, which was a little deranged, and turned quietly to Sir Miles:

'You will oblige me, Sir Miles? Thank you, gentlemen all—your servant.'

He resumed his walk, lounging among the trees, the women looking after him with a mixture of fright and admiration, as calm as if nothing had happened.

The man who was beaten was followed off the field by his friends. Nor could Sir Miles get speech of them that evening. In the morning, when he went to make his murderous appointment, he found they were gone. Fighting, it would seem, was not to their liking; though an insult to a harmless gentleman was quite in their way.

'I am sorry, Harry,' I said honestly, because a woman cannot help respecting a man who is brave and strong, 'that the taking of my name has caused you this trouble.'

'I am sorry, too,' he said, sadly. 'Yet I blame them not, Kitty.'

'But you do blame me,' I replied. 'Harry, if, in a little while—somehow—I am able to show that I could not, even if I wished, grant the thing you want—if—I say—I can make that quite clearly and plainly to you—will you promise to be reconciled to what cannot—cannot be avoided?'

'If, Kitty—what an if! But you ask the

impossible. There is no reason, there cannot be. Why, such a thing is impossible.'

'But again—if—— Harry, promise me so much.'

He laughed grimly.

'Well, I promise.'

'Give me your hand upon it,' I said. 'Now we shall be friends indeed. Why, you silly Harry, you let the days go by, and you neglect the most beautiful girls who could perhaps make you a hundred times as happy as Kitty, all because you deck her out with imaginary virtues which she doth not possess. Foolish Harry! Open your eyes and look about you. What do you see?'

I, for my part, saw pretty Nancy running along the walk to meet us. Love was in her eyes, grace in her action; youth, beauty, sweetness in her comely shape, her rosy cheeks, her pretty smile, her winning tongue, her curly locks. She was in morning dress, without hoop or patch. Through the leaves of the trees the sun shone softly upon her, covering her with a soft light which might have been that in which Venus stole along the shore in a golden mist to meet her son—

of which my father had read to me. She was pretty, she was sweet; far prettier than I, who was so tall; far sweeter than I, who was full of evil passions and shame, being a great sinner.

'Foolish Harry!' I said. 'What do you see?'

He only looked me in the face and replied:

'I see nothing but the beautiful Kitty.'

'Oh, blind, blind!'

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW DURDANS WAS ILLUMINATED.

While these things were proceeding, Lord Chudleigh being still absent from Durdans, I received a second letter from the doctor.

After the usual compliments to Mrs. Esther, he proceeded to the important part of his communication:

'*For your private eye only.*

'I have to tell you that yesterday I saw and conversed with Lord Chudleigh. He sought me in order to find out, if possible, the name, character, and condition of a certain person. I refused to grant him that information, I also assured him that he would find it impossible to break the alliance with which I had provided him. This I did with

the greater pleasure, having heard from a sure source that he hath lately paid addresses to you of so particular a kind as to make the whole company at Epsom Wells believe that they mean honourable proposals. I presume, therefore, that could he destroy the evidence of his former marriage he would be prepared to offer his hand. This is every way better than I could expect or wish, because when the moment arrives for informing him of the truth, I can point out to his lordship that his opinion and mine of what a wife should be exactly agree. Our triumph will then be complete.'

Our triumph! This was what he called it. I was to be the consenting party to inflict shame and humiliation upon my lord. This was too much. Humiliation for him? Why, it was for myself, and my whole thoughts were how to save him, how to set him free. The doctor expected me to triumph over him. Why, what did he know of a woman in love? To triumph over a man for whose dear sake she would lay down her life to save her lover from humiliation!

It was certain to my heart that my lord already felt for me that warmth of affection which impels a man to make a woman his wife. I was sure of this. I was so sure that I already gave myself in imagination entirely to him, and placed his interests above my own.

In short, before I ventured to confess the fact to myself, and before he spoke to me—for as yet he had said no word except in compliment and common gallantry—I loved him. There was, for me, but one thing wanting to make me happy; there was, for me, nothing to think of, to hope for, to pray for, but the welfare of that one man. And to such a woman did the doctor send such a letter, proposing that I should join him in covering him with shame and indignation. Would I thus let him choose the moment to confess my shameful sin? Would I assist in covering the man I loved with confusion, who would have clothed him in purple and placed a chain about his neck, and helped him to ride forth in bravery and triumph? Forbid the thought, kind Heaven! Oh, that a man should have such a mind, so thick and cloudy

as not to perceive that no woman but the basest and worst could join a conspiracy so hateful! Unhappy girl, to be made the victim of a plot in which the punishment would fall upon herself, while the wickedness would rest with the man who devised it, and he against whom the plot was designed would be its sole avenger!

I resolved to be beforehand with the doctor. I would myself choose the time; I would tell him all: I would assure him that, innocent as I had been in intention, I would never, never seek to assert any rights over him; that he was free, and could go seek a wife where he pleased. Ah! should he please to go elsewhere, it were better had I never been born.

Then, whatever moment I might choose for the confession, I could think of none which could be chosen as favourable to myself. I might write to him. That would be best; I would write: for how could a girl bear to see that face, which had always looked upon her with kindness and affection, suddenly grow hard and stern, and reproach her for her great wickedness with looks of horror

and indignation? It seemed better to write. But, for reasons which will presently appear, that letter was never written.

My lord returned. He called upon us next forenoon, and informed us, looking grave and downcast, that he proposed to hold his garden-party in Durdans Park on the next day. People had come from Vauxhall to decorate the trees, and there would be fireworks, with supper, and concert of horns.

I asked him, deceitfully, if his business in London had prospered. He replied that it had not turned out so favourably as he hoped: and then he checked himself and added that, to be sure, his affairs were of no interest to us.

Said Mrs. Esther:

'Your lordship will not, I hope, believe that anything which contributes to your happiness is so indifferent to us.'

He bowed, and we began to talk again about his *fête*.

His invitations included all the visitors of respectability at Epsom. Nancy, out of pure kindness, had gone about inquiring of every-

one if he was invited; and, if not, she got him an invitation at once. We did not, indeed, include the tallow-chandlers and hosiers of London, who frequented Epsom that year in great numbers, but took up their own end of the Assembly Rooms, and mostly walked on the New Parade. But we included all who could claim to belong to the polite world, because nothing is more humiliating than to be omitted from such a festivity at a watering-place. I have known a lady of fashion retire from Bath in mortification, being forgotten at a public tea, and never again show her face at that modish but giddy town.

The company were to assemble at five o'clock, the place of meeting being fixed in that part of Durdans Park most remote from the mansion, where the great trees of birch and elm make such an agreeable wilderness that one might fancy oneself in some vast forest. We were escorted by Sir Miles Lackington, who came because all his brother gamblers had deserted the card-room for the day; and Mr. Stallabras—Solomon—was dressed in another new coat (of purple), and

wore a sword with a surprisingly fine hilt. He also had a pair of shoe-buckles in gold, given him by his female Mæcenas, the widow of the brewer, in return for a copy of verses. He was greatly elated, never before having received an invitation from a person of such exalted rank.

'Now, indeed,' he said, 'I feel the full sweetness of fame. This it is, Miss Kitty, to be a poet. His society is eagerly sought by the Great: he stands serene upon the giddy height of fashion, ennobled by the Muses (who possess, like our own august sovereign, the right of conferring rank): he takes his place as an equal among those who are ennobled by birth. No longer do I deplore that obscurity of origin which once seemed to shut me out of the circles of the polite. Fetter Lane may not be concealed in my biography: it should rather be held up to fame as the place in which the sunshine of Apollo's favour (Apollo, Miss Kitty, was the sun-god as well as the god of poets, which makes the image appropriate)—the sunshine of Apollo has once rested during the birth of a humble child. It was at number forty-one

in the second pair back, a commodious garret, that the child destined to immortality first saw the light. No bees (so far as I can learn) played about his cradle, nor did any miracles of precocious genius foreshadow his future greatness. But, with maternal prescience, his mother named him Solomon.'

All this because Nancy made Lord Chudleigh send him an invitation! Yet I doubt whether his lordship had ever read one of his poems.

'It is a great blessing for a man to be a poet,' said Sir Miles, smiling. 'If I were a poet I dare say I should believe that my acres were my own again. If I were a poet I should believe that luck would last.'

'Does the name of Kitty cease to charm?' I asked.

Yes, it was true: Sir Miles had lost his five hundred guineas, won of the nabob, and was now reduced to punt at a guinea a night. This hardship made him melancholy.

'Yet,' he said, plucking up, 'if I cannot play, I can drink. Why, my jolly poet,' slapping Solomon on the shoulder, 'we will

presently toast Miss Kitty as long as his lordship's champagne lasts.'

Mrs. Esther said that she saw no reason why, because one vice was no longer possible, another should take its place.

'Madam,' said the baronet, 'it is not that I love one more than the other. When the purse is full, Hazard is my only queen. When the purse is empty, I call for the bowl.'

In such converse we entered the park, and followed in the procession of visitors, who flocked to the place of meeting where, under the trees, like another Robin Hood, Lord Chudleigh stood to receive his guests.

Kind Fortune has taken me to many feasts and rejoicings since that day, but there are none to which my memory more fondly and tenderly reverts; for here, amid the sweet scent of woodland flowers, under the umbrageous trees, while the air of the Downs, fragrant and fresh, fanned our cheeks, my lord became my lover, and I knew that he was mine for ever, in that sweet bond of union which shall only be exchanged by death for another of more perfect love,

through God's sweet grace. Ah, day of days! whose every moment lives eternally in our hearts! Sometimes I think that there will hereafter be no past at all, but that the sinner shall be punished by the ever-present shame of his sins, and the saints rewarded by the continual presence of great and noble thoughts.

Horns were stationed at various parts of the park, and while we drank tea, served to us at rustic tables beneath the trees, these answered one another in lively or plaintive strains. The tea finished, we danced to the music of violins, on a natural lawn, as level as a bowling-green, which seemed made for the feet of fairies. After an hour of minuets, the country dances began, and were carried on until sunset. Then for a while we roamed beneath the trees, and watched the twilight grow darker, and presently rose the great yellow harvest moon.

'In such a scene,' said Solomon, who was discoursing to a bevy of ladies, 'man shrinks from speaking: he is mute: his tongue cleaves to his palate'—at all events, the poet was not mute—'here nature proclaims the

handiwork of the Creator.' He tapped his forehead reflectively.

> 'Great Nature speaks: confused the sceptic flies;
> Rocks, woods, and stars sing truth to all the skies.'

All the while the concert of the horns charmed the ear, while the romantic aspect of the woods by night elevated the soul. When we returned to our lawn we were delighted and surprised to find coloured lamps hanging from the trees already lit, imparting a look most magical and wonderful, so that we cried aloud for joy. Nor was this all: the tables were laid for supper with every delicacy that our noble host could think of or provide.

Everybody was happy that evening. I think that even Peggy Baker forgot her jealousies, and forgave me for the moment when Lord Chudleigh gave as a toast, the 'Queen of the Wells,' and all the gentlemen drained a bumper in honour of Kitty Pleydell.

While the supper went on, a choir of voices sang glees and madrigals. Never was party more enchanting: never was an evening more balmy: never were guests more pleased or host more careful for them.

After supper more lamps were lit and hung upon the trees: the violins began again, and country dances set in.

Now while I looked on, being more delighted to see than to dance—besides, my heart was strangely moved with what I now know was a presentiment of happiness—Lord Chudleigh joined me, and we began to talk, not indifferently, but, from the first, gravely and seriously.

'You will not dance, Miss Kitty?' he asked.

'No, my lord,' I replied; 'I would rather watch the scene, which is more beautiful than anything I have ever dreamed of.'

'Come with me,' he said, offering me his hand, 'to a place more retired, whence we can see the gaiety, without hearing too much the laughter.'

They should have been happy without laughing: the cries of merriment consorted not with the scene around us.

Outside the circle of the lamps the woods were quite dark, but for the light of the solemn moon. We wandered away from the noise of the dancers, and presently came to a

rustic bench beneath a tree, where my lord invited me to rest.

It was not so dark but that I could see his face, which was grave and unlike the face of an eager lover. There was sadness in it and shame, as belongs to one who has a thing to confess. Alas! what ought to have been the shame and sadness of my face?

'While they are dancing and laughing,' he said, 'let us talk seriously, you and I, Miss Kitty.'

'Pray go on, my lord,' I said, trembling.

He began, not speaking of love, but of general things: of the ambition which is becoming to a man of rank: of the serious charge and duties of his life: of the plans which he had formed in his own mind worthily to pass through the years allotted to him, and to prepare for the eternity which waits us all beyond.

'But,' he said, sadly, 'we wander in the dark, not knowing which way to turn: and if we take a wrong step, whether from inadvertence or design, the fairest plan may be ruined, the most careful schemes destroyed.'

'But we have a guide,' I said, 'and a light.'

'We follow not our leader, and we hide the light. Addison hath represented life under the image of a bridge, over which men are perpetually passing. But the bridge is set everywhere with hidden holes and pitfalls, so that he who steps into one straightway falls through and is drowned. We are not always drowned by the pitfalls of life, but, which is as bad, we are maimed and broken, so that for the rest of our course we go halt.'

'I pray, my lord,' I said, 'that you may escape these pitfalls, and press on with the light before you to the goal of your most honourable ambition.'

'It is too late,' he said, sadly. 'Miss Kitty, you see in me the most wretched of mortals, who might, I would sometimes venture to think, have become the most happy.'

'You wretched, Lord Chudleigh?'—oh, beating heart!—'you wretched? Of all men you should be the most happy.'

'I have tried,' he said, 'to escape from the

consequences of a folly—nay, a crime. But it is impossible. I am fast bound and tied.' He took my hand and held it, while he added: 'I may not say what I would: I may not even think, or hope, or dream of what might have been.'

'Might have been, my lord?'

'Which cannot, now, ever be. Kitty, I thought after I discovered that it was impossible that I would not return any more to Epsom Wells: in the country, or away on foreign travel, I might in time forget your face, your voice, your eyes—the virtues and graces which sit so well in a form so charming—the elevated soul——'

'My lord! my lord!' I cried, 'spare me—— Yet,' I added, 'tell me all that is in your mind. If I cannot rid you of your burden, at least I may soothe your sorrow.'

'The matter,' he replied, 'lies in a few words, Kitty. I love you, and I may not ask you to be my wife.'

I was silent for a while. He stood before me, his face bent over mine.

'Why not?' I asked.

'Because I have been a fool—nay, worse

than a fool, a knave; because I am tied by bonds which I cannot break: and I am unworthy of so much goodness and virtue.'

'Oh!' I cried, 'you know not. How can you know? I am none of the things which you imagine in me. I am a poor and weak girl; if you knew me you would surely think so too. I cannot bear that you should think me other than what I am.'

'Why, my angel, your very modesty and your tears are the proof that you are all I think, and more.'

'No,' I cried. 'If I told you all: if I could lay bare my very soul to you, I think that you could'—I was going to add, 'love me no longer,' but I caught myself up in time—'that you could no longer think of me as better, but rather as worse, than other girls.'

'You know,' he said, 'that I love you, Kitty. You have known that for some time—have you not?'

'Yes, my lord,' I replied, humbly; 'I have known it, and have felt my own unworthiness. Oh, so unworthy, so unworthy am I that I have wept tears of shame.'

'Nay—nay,' he said. 'It is I who am unworthy. My dear, there is nothing you could tell me which would make me love you less.'

I shook my head. There was one thing which I had to tell. Could any man be found to forgive that?

'I came back here resolved to tell you all. If I could not ask for your love, Kitty, I might, at the very least, win your pity.'

'What have you to tell me, my lord?'

It was well that the night was so dark that my face could not be seen. Oh, tell-tale cheeks, aglow with fear and joy!

'What have you to tell me?' I repeated.

'It is a story which I trust to your eyes alone,' he said. 'I have written it down. Before we part to-night I will give it to you. Come'—he took my hand again, but his was cold—'come, we must not stay longer. Let me lead you from this slippery and dangerous place.'

'One moment'—I would have lingered there all night to listen to the accents of his dear voice. 'If you, my lord, have a secret to tell to me, I also have one to tell you.'

'Nay,' he replied. 'I can hear none of your pretty secrets. My peace is already destroyed. Besides,' he added desperately, 'when you have read what I have written you will see that it would be idle to waste another thought upon me.'

'I will read it,' I said, 'to-night. But, my lord, on one promise.'

'And that is?'

'That you will not leave Epsom without my knowledge. Let me speak with you once more after I have read it, if it is only to weep with you and to say farewell.'

'I promise.'

'And—oh, my lord! if I may say it—since your lordship may not marry me, then I, for your sake, will never marry any other man.'

'Kitty!'

'That is my promise, my lord. And perhaps—sometimes—you will give a thought to your poor—fond Kitty.'

He caught me in his arms and showered kisses upon my cheeks and lips, calling me his angel and a thousand other names, until I gently pushed him from me and begged

him to take me back to the company. He knelt at my feet and took my hand in his, holding it in silence. I knew that he was praying for the blessing of Heaven upon my unworthy head.

Then he led me back to the circle of lights, when the first person we met was Miss Peggy Baker.

'Why, here,' she cried, looking sharply from one to the other, 'are my lord and Miss Pleydell. Strange that the two people we have most missed should be found at the same time—and together, which is stranger still.'

Nancy left her swains and ran to greet me.

'My dear,' she whispered, 'you have been crying. Is all well?'

'I am the happiest woman and the most unhappy in the world,' I said. 'I wish I were in my bed alone and crying on my pillow;' and she squeezed my hand and ran back to her lovers.

My lord himself walked home with us. We left before the party broke up. At parting he placed in my hand a roll of paper.

'Remember,' I whispered; 'you have promised.'

He made no answer, but stooped and kissed my fingers.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW MY LORD MADE HIS CONFESSION.

It was not a long manuscript. I kissed the dear handwriting before I began.

'To the Queen of my Heart,' it began.

'Dearest Girl,

'Since I first had the happiness of worshipping at your shrine I have learned, from watching your movements, listening to your voice, and looking at your face, something of what that heavenly beauty must have been like which, we are told, captivated and drove mad the ancients, even by mere meditation and thought upon it.' Did ever girl read more beautiful language? 'And by conversations with you, even in the gay assembly or on the crowded Terrace,

I have learned to admire and to love that goodness of heart which God hath bestowed upon the most virtuous among women. I say this in no flattery or desire to pay an empty compliment, but sincerely, and out of the respect and admiration, as well as the love, which I have conceived for one who is, I dare maintain, all goodness.' Oh, Kitty, Kitty! to read this with blushing cheeks and biting conscience! Surely it must make people good to be believed good; so that, by a little faith, we might raise and purify all mankind!

'It is my purpose to-night, if I find an opportunity, to tell you that I am the most wretched man in the world, because by a fatal accident, of which I must presently force myself to speak, I am for ever shut out from the happiness which it was, I believe, the intention of a merciful Providence to confer upon me. Yet am I also fortunate, and esteem myself happy in this respect, that I have for once in my life been in the presence of as much female beauty and virtue as was ever, I believe, found together in one human soul. To tell you these things, to

speak of my love, is an alleviation of suffering. To tell the cause of this unhappiness is worse than to plunge a knife into my heart. Yet must it be told to your ear alone.

'Last year, about the early summer, a rumour began to run through the coffee-houses that there was a man of extraordinary wit, genius, and humour to be met with in the Liberties, or Rules, of the Fleet Prison. These Rules, of which you know nothing'—oh, Kitty! nothing!—'are houses, or lodgings, lying in certain streets adjacent to the Fleet Market, where prisoners for debt are allowed, on payment of certain fees, and on finding security, to reside outside the prison. In fact they are free, and yet being, in the eyes of the law, still prisoners, they cannot any more be arrested for debt. Among these prisoners of the Rules was a certain Reverend Gregory Shovel, a man of great learning, a Doctor of Divinity of Cambridge, a divine of eloquence and repute, once a fashionable preacher, who, being of extravagant and luxurious habits, which brought him into expenditure above his means, at last found himself a prisoner in the Fleet; and pre-

sently, through the influence of friends, was placed in the enjoyment of the Rules.

'Here, whether because he had exhausted the generosity of his friends, or because he craved for action, or for the baser purposes of gain, he became that most unworthy thing, a Fleet parson—one of a pestilent crew who go through the form of marriage for all comers, and illegally bind together for life those whom Heaven, in mercy and knowledge, had designed to be kept asunder.

'I believe that, by his extraordinary ability and impudence, coupled with the fact that he really was, what his rivals chiefly pretended to be, a clergyman of the Established Church of England and Ireland, he has managed to secure the principal part of this nefarious trade to himself, and has become what he has named himself, "the Chaplain of the Fleet."

'This person attracted to himself, little by little, a great gathering of followers, admirers, or friends. No one, I suppose, could be the friend of one who had so fallen; therefore the men who thronged to his lodgings, nearly every night in the week, were drawn thither

by the fashion of running after a man who talked, sang, told stories, and kept open house in so desperate a quarter as the Fleet Market, and who yet had the manners of a gentleman, the learning of a scholar, and the experience of a traveller.

'It was for this reason, solely for curiosity, that on one fatal evening last year I entreated Sir Miles Lackington, a former friend of my father's and myself, to present me to the doctor. You have made the acquaintance of Sir Miles. He was once, though perhaps the fact has not been made known to you by him, also a prisoner of the Rules. To this had he been brought by his inordinate love of gambling, by which he had stripped himself, in six months, of as fine an estate as ever fell to the lot of an English gentleman, and brought himself to a debtor's prison. Sir Miles, who, when he could no longer gamble, showed signs of possessing virtues hitherto unsuspected in him, offered, on the occasion of borrowing a few guineas of me, to conduct me, if I wished to spend an evening with the doctor, as he is called, to the house which this doctor either owns or frequents.

'I am not a lover of that low humour and those coarse scenes depicted by Mr. Fielding and Dr. Smollett. I do not delight in seeing drunken men sprawl in the gutter, nor women fight upon Fleet Bridge, nor bears baited, nor pickpockets and rogues pilloried or flogged. But I was promised something very different from these scenes. I was to meet, Sir Miles told me, a remarkable man, who could narrate, declaim, preach, or sing a drinking song, just as he was in the vein.

'I accepted the invitation, the strangeness of which affected my curiosity rather than excited my hopes. I was to witness, I thought, the spectacle of a degraded wretch who lived by breaking the law, for each offence being liable to a penalty of not less than a hundred pounds. It would be, I expected, such a sight as that which the drunken Helot once presented to the virtuous Spartan youth.

'We made our way through a mean and filthy neighbourhood, by the side of a market heaped with cabbage-stalks, past houses where, through the common panes of green glass set in leaden frames, one might see a

rushlight or a tallow candle feebly glimmering, for a crew of drunken men to shout songs and drink beside.

'The room into which I was led opened off the street, and was of fair proportions, but low. In it was a table, at the head of which, in a vast wooden chair, sat a man who looked, though perhaps he was not, the biggest man I had ever seen. Some tall men have small hands, or narrow shoulders, or small heads; Dr. Shovel is great all over, with a large and red face, a silk cassock, a full and flowing wig, clean bands, and a flowered morning-gown very large and comfortable.

'He seemed struck with some astonishment on hearing my name, but presently recovered, and invited me to sit at his right hand. Sir Miles sat at his left. The room was pretty full, and we found that the evening had already begun by the exhaustion of the first bowl of punch. The guests consisted of gentlemen who came, like myself, to see and converse with the famous doctor: and of prisoners who, like Sir Miles, were living in the Rules.

'As the punch went round, the talk grew

more jovial. That is to say, the talk of the doctor, because no one else said anything. He talked continuously; he talked of everything. He seemed to know everything, and to have been everywhere. When he was not talking he was singing. At intervals he smoked a pipe of tobacco, which did not interrupt his talk; and he never ceased sending round the punch. I found that the visitors were expected to provide this part of the entertainment.

'I am sure that the kindest-hearted of women will believe me when I tell her that I am no drunkard. Yet there are times when, owing to the foolish custom of calling for toasts, no heeltaps, and a brimming glass, the most careful head may be affected. Nor can I plead inexperience in the dangers of the bottle, after three years at St. John's, Cambridge, where the Fellows of the Society, and the noblemen and gentlemen commoners on the Foundation, drank freely at every college feast of the college port and the punch sent up from the butteries. I had been like other young men, but I trust that your imagination will not picture Lord Chud-

leigh carried away from the combination-room and put to bed by a couple of the college gyps. Yet, worse still, I have to present that spectacle before your eyes, not at a grave and reverend college feast, but in the dissolute Liberties of the Fleet.

'The atmosphere of the room was close and hot, with the smell of the tobacco and the fumes of the punch-bowl. Presently I found that my eyes were beginning to swim and my head to reel. I half rose to go, but the doctor, laying his hand upon me, cried, with a great oath, that we should not part yet.

'By this time Sir Miles was lying with his head on the table. Some of the guests were lying on the floor; some were singing, some crying; some kissing each other. It was, in short, one of those scenes of debauchery which may be witnessed whenever a party of men meet together to drink. I sat down; it was plain that I could not escape from these hogs without myself becoming a hog. I sat still, therefore, while the doctor still talked, still laughed, still waved his monstrous great hand in the air as he talked, and the punch

still went briskly round among the few who sat upright.

'In the morning I was awakened by no other than my host of the preceding evening, in whose bed I had spent the rest of the night, unconscious.

'He stood over me with grave face, and, in reproachful accents, asked me how I fared and for what purpose I had come to him? I was still half drunk; I could not remember for what purpose. He assisted me to dress; and then, because I could not stand, he gave me a mug of small ale with which to clear my brain.

'Being thus partly restored to my senses, I listened while he answered his own question and told me why I had come to him.

'"You came," he said, "to be married."

'I stared. He repeated the words:

'"You came to be married."

'It seems incredible that a man should hear a statement so utterly false and not cry out upon the liar. Yet I did not. My brain was confused, that is my excuse. Also, this great man seemed to hold me like a wizard,

while he held up his forefinger and, with wrinkled brow, shook it in my face.

'"You came to be married."

'Good heavens! What did this mean? I was drunk, horribly drunk the night before—I could not remember—so drunk was I—how I came to the house, with whom, with what intent.

'"She waits below," he told me.

'She? Who?

He gave me his arm to support me down the stairs. I descended, curious and agitated. I remember a figure with a hood. While I looked, this Chaplain of the Devil began the marriage service, his eyes still fixed on me while he recited, and seemed to read.

'When he had finished I was married.

'After we had signed a book he gave me another great mug of ale, which I drank to the bottom.

'Then, I suppose, I rolled over, and was carried upstairs, for I remember nothing more until the evening, when I was again awakened by this rogue and common cheat, who, sitting by my bedside, congratulated me calmly on the day's work.

'I will not go on to tell you all the things he said. I discovered that in some way, I know not how, but can guess, my father had once done this man an injury. This conspiracy was his revenge.

'Who was my wife?

'He would not tell me.

'What was her position, her birth, her name? Was she some wretched creature who could be bought off to keep silence while she lived, although she was a thing to be ashamed of and to hide? Was she some person who would trade on her title, parade her infamy, and declare herself to the world as Lady Chudleigh by her lord's marriage in the Fleet? A hundred things I asked. He would give me no reply.

'Her name? I had forgotten it. The register? it had been put away. I seemed to know the name, somehow; yet it escaped me. In the night it came back to me in a dream; yet in the morning it was gone again. Once, after my first evening with you, the name came to me once more in a dream; yet it was gone when I awoke, and could remember no other name than yours. It is nearly a year

ago. I know not yet whom I married. She hath made no sign. Yet know I full well that the day will come when she will confess herself and demand acknowledgment.

'One hope remains: that the marriage is not valid. It is a slender hope, for the man is an ordained clergyman of the Established Church. I am going to London to see him, to implore his pity, to humble myself if necessary.

* * * * *

'It is of no avail. I have gone. I have humbled myself, and then, flying into the opposite extreme, I have cursed him. He enjoyed both the wrath and the humility.

'I have no longer any hope; I have taken the advice of my lawyers, who tell me that an Act of Parliament alone can set me free; this Act—how can it be got when I do not know the name of the woman?

'Even if there were any reasonable chance that so dreadful a place could produce a woman of virtue and honour, which there is not, I could never look upon that woman with any but feelings of loathing and horror. For not only is her idea black beyond com-

pare, but my heart is full, and will remain for ever full, of Kitty Pleydell.

'Strange to say, as I wrote the words, it seemed as if I had touched at last the chord of memory. The name was on my lips. No —it was an illusion; I have forgotten it again, and can only murmur Kitty Pleydell, sweet Kitty, divine Kitty, on whom may all the blessings of Heaven rest for ever!'

CHAPTER XV.

HOW NANCY HAD A QUICK TONGUE.

This was at once a sad and yet most joyful confession. For while the girl who read it was full of shame and terror in thinking of his righteous wrath and loathing, yet the tender love which filled the pages and fired her soul with wonder and rejoicing forbade her to believe that love was not stronger than wrath. She was so ignorant and inexperienced, the girl who joined in this treacherous deed; she was so dominated by the will of that masterful man, her uncle; she was so taken by surprise—surely, when he learned these things, he would forgive the past.

But should she tell him at once?

It would be better to tell him than that

he should find it out. There were many ways in which he could find it out. Oh, the shame of being found out, the meanness of taking all his secrets and giving none! Roger, the doctor's man, might for a bribe, were the bribe heavy enough to outweigh his fear of the doctor, tell the name of the bride; the doctor might think the time come when he should step forward and reveal the secret; even there was danger that his lordship might remember the name which he had seen but once, and ask me sternly if there were upon the earth two Kitty Pleydells, of the same age, the same height, and the same face. And what should I say then?

Stimulated by this thought, as by the touch of a sharp spur, I procured an inkstand and paper, and began to write a letter of confession.

'My Lord,'

What to say next?

'My Lord,'

In what words to clothe a most shameful story?

We cheat ourselves; we do one thing and call it another; we stop the voice of conscience by misrepresenting our actions; and whereas we ought to be weighed down by the burden of our sins, we carry ourselves confidently, with light hearts, as if we had done nothing to be ashamed of. It is only when our crimes are set forth in plain English that we know them for the shameful things they are. What was I to tell my lord?

A girl, brought up in the fear of God and His commandments, can be so weak as to obey a man who ordered her to do a wicked thing. Could she be, afterwards, so cowardly as not to tell the man whom she had thus injured, even when she knew that he loved her? A wicked crime and a course of deceit! How could I frame the words so as to disarm that righteous wrath?

'My Lord,

'It has been for a long time upon my conscience to tell you a thing which you ought to know before you waste one more thought upon the unworthy person to whom you addressed a confession. That confession,

indeed, depicted your lordship with such fidelity as to make me the more ashamed to unburden my conscience. Know, then, that——'

Here I stopped, with trembling fingers which refused to move.

'Know that'—what? That I was his wicked and unworthy wife, the creature whom most of all he must hate and despise.

I could not tell him—not then. No; it must be told by word of mouth, with such extenuating phrases and softening of details as might present themselves to my troubled mind.

I tore the letter into a thousand fragments. Was girl ever so bested? That sacred bond of union which brings happy lovers together, the crown of courtship, the end of wooing, the marriage service itself, was the thing which kept us asunder.

I would tell him—later on. There would come an opportunity. I would make the opportunity, somewhere, at some time. Yes; the best way would be to wait till we were alone: it should be in the evening, when my face and his would be partly veiled by the

night; then I could whisper the story, and ask his forgiveness.

But that opportunity never came, as will be presently seen.

After morning prayers, that day we walked upon the Terrace, where the company were, as usual, assembled, and all talking together below the trees. I held in my hand the manuscript of my lord's confession. Presently we saw him slowly advancing to meet us, wearing a grave and melancholy look. But then he was never one of those who think that the duties of life are to be met with a reckless laugh.

'Even in laughter,' said the Wise Man, 'the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.'

'Dear Miss Pleydell,' whispered Peggy Baker, as he appeared, 'can his lordship have repented already of what he said beneath the trees last night? The poor young gentleman wears a heavy countenance this morning.'

It was best to make no answer to this raillery. Let her say what she would; I cared nothing, and was too heavy myself to

make reply. I would neither help nor hinder. Then, leaving Mrs. Esther with the party, I advanced boldly and met my lord, returning him his manuscript before the eyes of all.

Everybody stared, wondering what could be the packet I placed in his hands; he, however, received it with a low bow, and accompanied me to my party, saying nothing for the moment.

The music was playing its loudest, and as we walked, my lord beside me, and Mrs. Esther with Lady Levett—Nancy remaining behind to exchange insinuations and pert speeches (in which the saucy damsel took great delight) with Peggy Baker. I looked back and saw their heads wagging, while the bystanders smiled, and presently Peggy fanned herself, with agitation in her face, by which it was easy to conclude that Nancy had said something more than unusually biting, to which her opponent had, for the moment, no reply ready.

'You have read these papers?' asked my lord, and that in as careless a tone as if they contained nothing of importance.

'Yes,' I said, 'I have read the sad story. But I pity the poor woman who was persuaded to do your lordship this grievous wrong.'

'I think she needs and deserves little of our pity,' he replied. 'And as for persuasion, it could have wanted but little with a woman so designing as to join in such a plot.'

A designing woman! Poor Kitty!

Then I tried, beating about the bush, to bring his mind round to see the possibility of a more charitable view.

'Remember, my lord, two things. This Dr. Shovel could not have known of your coming. The plot, therefore, was swiftly conceived, and as quickly carried into execution. You have told me in your paper—I entreat you, my lord, burn it with all speed—that this man's influence over you was so great as to coerce you (because your brain was not in its natural clearness) into doing and suffering, what, at ordinary times, you would have rejected with scorn. Bethink you, then, with charity, that this Dr. Shovel, this so-called Chaplain of the Fleet, may have found some poor girl, over whom he had

authority, and in like manner coerced and forced her to join with him in this most wicked plot.'

'You would make excuses,' he said, 'for the greatest of sinners. I doubt not that. But this story is too improbable. I cannot think that any woman could be so coerced against her will.'

I sighed.

'My lord, I beg you to remember your promise to me. You will not leave Epsom without first telling me: you will not seek out this man, this Dr. Shovel, or quarrel with him, or do aught to increase his malice. Meantime, I am feeble, being only a woman, and bound in obedience and duty to my guardian and protectress. Yet I bethink me of an old fable. The lion was one day caught in the coils of a net, and released by the teeth of a——'

He started.

'What does this mean? Oh, Kitty! what can you do?'

'I do not know. Yet, perhaps I may be able to release you from the coils of this net. Have patience, my lord.'

'Kitty!'

'Let us speak no more about it for the moment,' I replied. 'Perhaps, my lord, if my inquiries lead to the result you desire—it is Christian to forgive your enemies——'

'I cannot understand you,' he replied. 'How should you—how should anyone—release me? Truly, if deliverance came, forgiveness were a small thing to give.'

END OF VOL. II.

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